

The Hidden Truths of Self-Presentation, Self-Disclosure, and Deception on Online

Dating Profiles: A Call for Change

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Abstract

The way in which individuals seek romantic partners has changed considerably in the past decades, most notably through online dating sites (ODSs). Despite the possibility of misrepresentation amongst client users, such sites continue to grow in popularity because ODSs provide a large pool from which individuals can select and attract potential partners. While much research has been undertaken on ODSs, little empirical research has examined postsecondary students' use of ODSs. Therefore, this study sought to investigate why postsecondary students have become involved with and how they present themselves on ODSs. The researcher surveyed 20 postsecondary students and conducted in-depth interviews with 2 participants who use ODSs. Although the limited sample prevented results from being generalized, quantitative and qualitative analyses suggest that participants became involved with ODSs for various purposes, such as seeking long-term relationships and/or marriage partners, or simply exploring or visiting ODSs out of curiosity. Findings indicate that ODS users' physical appearance and/or "attractiveness" is considered the strongest predictor of relationship success. The study discusses how participants' self-presentation affects outcomes of ODS usage, particularly when negative self-identification and presentation corresponding to factors such as individuals' weight and age are taken into account.

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« Un mot qui veut tout dire : Merci »

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of my lovely parents and as a means to help heal and give voice to Sofia whose experiences were my greatest motivation to conduct this study.

Prologue

This research was inspired by the story of Sofia¹ who, at 40 years of age, had recently ended a common-law relationship as an indirect victim of online dating sites (ODSs). Sofia's description of her ex-boyfriend's addiction to so-called virtual sex and involvement in ODSs and online chat rooms clearly showed the potentially devastating impact of ODSs on individuals' lives, as well as the repercussions for their families. After becoming acquainted with her story, I thought that the consequences of Sofia's experience held a significant message that could be conveyed via scholarly research to help vulnerable and naïve individuals who currently are or may become involved in ODSs.

Sofia's Story

Sofia had become accustomed to her boyfriend's frequent use of the Internet and the sound of his solitary typing at the keyboard of his computer while she sat in another room. While Sofia did not feel inordinately jealous, her partner's secrecy and apparent fascination with the Internet bothered her and she had begun to feel uneasy and somewhat suspicious. Upon entering the bedroom on a particular evening, Sofia's suspicions were confirmed as she witnessed what her partner had been viewing online. There was ample evidence that her common-law partner had actively been chatting with women through ODSs. Sofia later had the opportunity to view her partner's online profile and discovered that he had lied about his height, age, and marital status, and was seeking casual sexual encounters with other ODS users.

¹ Sofia's name has been changed to protect her anonymity, and both her story and her role throughout my thesis are used primarily for illustrative purposes; Sofia is not a participant in the study.

Sofia had often wondered about her boyfriend's behaviour and why he spent so much time on the Internet and chatting with strangers. Her discovery of his addictive behaviour was gradual and had begun with the initial discovery that particular evening a few months into their relationship, and culminated when she found a hidden cache of sexually explicit materials and photographs of women to whom he had been introduced through print media, ODSs, and social networking sites (SNSs) and chat rooms such as Facebook and MySpace. When Sofia approached her partner to discuss the matter more openly, he responded defensively. The tension later increased as her partner insisted Sofia gain better employment to contribute more to household expenses, though Sofia knew full well that considerable funds were spent on his addictions, and finally escalated into physical violence. Though Sofia would eventually understand that her partner's behaviour and quest for impersonal intimate contact with strangers compensated for his low-esteem, she was nonetheless devastated by this turn of events.

The relationship finally ended with Sofia knocking at the door of a women's shelter in Niagara Falls on a warm summer evening. A woman spoke through an intercom and directed Sofia to enter the building. Sofia retrieved her luggage from the taxi that had brought her to the shelter and thanked the cab driver. As she walked into the shelter, the counsellor with whom she had spoken on the phone an hour earlier greeted her and introduced her to the other shelter staff. Sofia stood there in shock and looked around, not really knowing where she was nor what would happen to her in the next few minutes, hours, and months. Earlier that day, Sofia had asked for support from the shelter not because she was homeless, but because she had become a victim of domestic violence.

CHAPTER ONE: RESEARCH CONTEXT

In this chapter, my study of ODSs is outlined in terms of a broad research context and implications of their use for dating and relationships. Before I enter this more general discussion, I would like to present a personal statement regarding my academic connection to ODSs.

Personal Statement: Academic Experiences Related to the Topic

While Sofia's story became the primary inspiration for the current study, several other factors motivated me to choose ODSs as a topic for my research. One of the foremost reasons was my burgeoning interest in social-justice issues, which led to my enrolment in a social science program and my decision to pursue a master's degree in education. This academic journey is the natural extension of my previous role as a counsellor and liaison office in community centres, working with culturally diverse individuals, vulnerable social groups, and women who were experiencing and/or survivors of a range of relationship-based issues that often resulted in domestic violence.

My interest in examining the risks and consequences related to SNS usage was augmented by my independent studies during my Master of Education program, particularly a course related to cyber-bullying and a series of Cyber Academy seminars facilitated by the Peel Regional Police service. During the latter workshops, I became aware of the potential consequences of SNSs and how deceptive self-presentation and self-disclosure practices are major concerns in SNSs' environments. I continued to broaden my knowledge of SNSs not only through my ongoing literature review on the subject, but also through discussions with professionals in the field.

Ultimately, the goal and purpose of my research narrowed because of Sofia's story and the outcomes of her experiences with ODSs. My subsequent conversations with others who had similar experiences both broadened and added depth to my understanding of the positive and negative effects of ODSs, which ultimately allowed me to think more critically about the consequences surrounding their use, particularly issues related to misrepresentation, self-disclosure, and deception in ODS environments. Finally, I wanted to understand why ODS services continued to allow, inadvertently or not, online daters to misrepresent themselves and exactly how such practices might impact individuals' personal and professional lives.

Through my research, I have found that although there are both governmental and non-governmental agencies (e.g., Sex Addicts Anonymous) in most cities that offer support to individuals whose lives have been affected by ODS-related experiences, in Ontario, there are no specialized sexual education courses that address ODSs and offer public information directly in workplaces or public and private high schools, colleges, and universities. Although, my research study represents a small step toward awareness of the risks and consequences of the ODS phenomenon, it nonetheless makes an important contribution to the existing social and academic literature on the subject. I am convinced that prevention is possible through research and the provision of relevant public education programs such as those recommended in this study.

The Emergence of ODSs for Finding Relationships

In modern societies, innovative ways of relationship interaction are emerging, and finding a romantic partner is taking on new forms and meanings. Online dating sites (ODSs) are perhaps the most noticeable example of these social trends. Like any other

product, a simple search engine for ODSs may results in more than a million options (Finkel, Eastwick, Karney, Reis, & Sprecher, 2012). The theoretical significance of focusing on ODSs is further confirmed by the interest shown by psychology and sociology researchers; however, existing studies on ODSs still fail to provide more relevant evidence of the hidden truth of the darkness of ODSs, and how ODSs might create negative impacts on individual personal and social relationships.

Before describing why and how individuals become involved in ODSs, and showing how this new way of interaction has changed in recent years; a brief description of the actual characteristics of ODSs and the service operated in these businesses is needed.

The Characteristics of ODSs

While there are numerous definitions for ODSs, Fiore, Taylor, Zhong, Mendelsohn and Cheshire (2010) have posited a comprehensive description that refers to ODSs as websites that allow daters² to create a personal profile including photos and text description, screen other daters' profiles, and contact them through private email messaging. For Couch, Liamputtong, and Pitts (2012) online dating means the practice of seeking a romantic partner and initiating an interaction with potential partners through ODSs, for the purpose of forming a short-term or a long-term relationship, perhaps even finding a marriage partner.

Finkel et al.'s (2012) detailed examination of ODS mechanisms showed that the majority of ODSs have a number of purposes, but their primary roles stand out as

² In the remainder of this study, I use the term "daters" to collectively represent individuals who use ODSs.

common across these sites. Finkel et al. have identified three particular services or features: (a) daters have the opportunity to assess potential partners before they meet them; (b) computer-mediated communication can be used before meeting face-to-face to find the exact potential partner that the daters are looking for; and (c) ODSs provide a mathematical algorithmic procedure for daters to select a romantic partner.

Characteristics of an Online Profile

Ellison, Hancock, and Toma (2012) define online profiles as an advertisement where online daters disclose their thoughts and feelings within wide-ranging networks of other daters in order to initiate, maintain, or be contacted by other online daters. Many online profiles contain personal and confidential information, such as age, gender, personal characteristics, physical appearance, photographs, email addresses, and phone numbers (Shtatfeld & Barak, 2009).

Besides, ODSs encourage online daters to be “charming daters” by adding attractive photographs in their profile (Toma, Hancock, & Ellison, 2008), which means that such photos are considered an important mechanism when creating a profile (Hancock & Toma, 2010) because online daters with attractive profiles are viewed more favourably (Brand, Bonatsos, D’Orazio, & DeShong, 2012). With this in mind, and in the absence of nonverbal cues, online daters often misrepresent themselves in ODS environments (McKenna, 2008).

Couch and Liamputtong (2008) state that cyber management is a fundamental mechanism of creating online profiles, while these authors and Hancock and Toma (2009) suggest that due to the anonymity of using ODSs, the majority of online daters manipulate their self-presentation through an online profile.

A few studies have documented online daters' behaviour and attitudes toward ODSs (e.g., Schaupp & Schaupp, 2012), and strived to understand why people turn to ODSs when seeking a romantic partner even though such sites increase the chances for deceptive self-presentation and thus may inherently in still a lack of trust (Schmitz, Zillman, & Blossfeld, 2013). Until now, however, there has been no reliable evidence that demonstrates the benefits of using ODSs as opposed to the more traditional methods of meeting potential romantic partners (Rosen, Cheever, Cummings, & Felt, 2008).

Background of the Problem

What we know about ODSs is largely based on empirical studies that suggest the evolution of the ODSs in the past few decades has progressively reduced traditional ways of interaction (Couch & Liamputtong, 2008), and it has been argued that ODSs have become successful largely because they not only allow daters to find a romantic partner through a large pool of daters (Finkel et al., 2012), but also claim to find a so-called perfect match for online daters (Brooks, 2011). Accordingly, the foremost goal of using these sites is finding a romantic partner either for a long-term or a short-term relationship (Couch et al., 2012; Shtatfeld & Barak, 2009; Whitty, 2011).

Prior evidence demonstrated that since ODSs creation in the mid-1990s, the perspective of daters looking for a mate has changed. According to Peter and Valkenburg (2007) over 37% of individuals in America have turned to an ODS seeking a romantic relationship. Other data from a survey conducted by Daneback, Månsson and Ross (2007) showed that nearly 55% of males and about 45% of females used ODSs for finding a sexual partner, and 35% males and 40% of female daters had a sexual encounter offline with a partner they have met online.

Other evidence also suggests that not all online daters seek a romantic partner for the purposes of a long-term relationship; some daters seek partners solely for the purpose of a casual encounter (Coleman, 2009), a sexual partner to discuss sex and exchange sexual/nude photos (Barraket & Henry-Waring, 2008; Sprecher, 2009), and/or a sexual partner to share fantasies, which may be followed by or concurrent with masturbation (Sevcikova & Daneback, 2011).

A recent study by Bateson, Weisberg, McCaffery and Luscombe (2012) involved a survey of 9,038 females aged 40 years and older and 5,508 females aged 18–39 years, on the subject of having sexual activity with a partner online. Bateson et al. found that in contrast to younger females, the older females were more likely to speak about sexually transmissible infections (STIs) with a potential partner who they met online before engaging in sexual activity; however, they had sexual activity with a partner without a condom. As a result, Bateson et al. state the occurrence of STIs is increasing among female daters with numerous sexual partners who they had met online.

There are other indications that suggest online daters with low self-esteem often tend to disclose more personal information, (i.e., emotions) in their profile (Heino, Ellison, & Gibbs, 2010). One of the most obvious risks and consequences of disclosing personal information is incurring other users' prejudices or leaving oneself open to the predatory behaviour of others during the latter's selection process (Ellison et al., 2012; Gibbs, Ellison, & Lai, 2011). Peters (2009) discusses the importance of prudent self-presentation and/or self-disclosure in ODS environments and argues that the world of online romance is rife with danger stemming from interactions with liars or, worse, sexual predators. Sadly, the majority of daters are unable to notice dishonesty exhibited

by other online users (Schmitz, Sachse-Thürer, Zillmann, & Blossfeld, 2011). More pointedly, one of the greatest shortcomings of ODSs is that they foster or at least condone users' deceptive self-presentation (Guadagno, Okdie, & Kruse, 2012), which as I will explain later, has significant ramifications because relationships that begin online often involve offline/face-to-face meetings (Koeppel, Smith, & Bouffard, 2013).

Although these sites were intentionally designed to facilitate social and/or intimate interaction and some of the ODSs offer free or low-cost access to their services (Brooks, 2011; Lawson & Leck, 2006), the greatest pitfall of such a wide-ranging service, the glut of user-profile information and potential romantic partners (Best & Delmege, 2012) presents a problem because online daters are ignorant of the high level risks and consequences of engaging in ODSs (Couch & Liamputtong, 2008). Users are also unaware of who has access to their personal information and who they are potentially attracting (Kang, Brown, & Kiesler, 2013).

Given this, though a number of studies have investigated the ODS process and its mechanisms, there is a dearth of literature considering the negative implications of deceptive self-presentation. One of the few articles I consulted on the subject, "Tragic Online Love Triangle Built on Lies," reported the negative impact of misrepresentation on individuals, Jesse and Montgomery, involved in ODSs:

Two middle-aged lovers who started an affair by BOTH posing as teenagers... before torrid romance drove Sunday school teacher to murder "rival" over woman who didn't EXIST. ... The chance encounter online between a gorgeous young 18-year-old ... and a handsome 18-year-old marine ... seemed on the surface to be innocent enough. However, what Jessi ... didn't know was that her "sweet sexy

Marine” was actually a 46-year-old married father of two. ... [Montgomery said] “I kept thinking, well, we’re never going to meet ... I’ll just play the game with her.” (Nye, 2012, paras. 2-10)

This article precisely addresses misrepresentation and self-disclosure in an ODS context, which according to Nye (2012) facilitates daters’ direct control over their deceptive self-presentation that in turn may provoke serious problems in daters’ lives. The story of Jesse and Montgomery clearly shows how the planned misrepresentation and deception ultimately led to devastating consequences for three families, a situation that could certainly happen to any online daters. Guadagno et al. (2012) remind us, however, that online daters should be cautious when considering the more nefarious aspects of self-presentations since not all ODS users are dishonest. Nonetheless, we should also question, as researchers and authorities, how we might reduce and prevent future tragedies.

Delozier (2012) describes a particular problem associated with photographs posted in online profiles, and that the majority of ODSs did not correctly remove online daters’ information which appeared in their photos: “Many of the profile photos submitted by users were taken with cameras and cell phones containing Global Positioning System (GPS) chips. “The photos contain metadata that can provide the GPS coordinates showing exactly where the photo was taken” (para. 2). While Delozier notes that some ODS companies take the time to remove such traceable information from ODS users’ posted photos, he also warns that 21 of 90 ODS companies examined in a particular study were unaware of the potential dangers of disseminating such information

publicly. Delozier observes, “An online predator would require no more than one website to act irresponsibly” (para. 6).

Although, some ODSs such as True.com perform background checks on daters, the increasing popularity of ODSs means that a greater number of online daters have become more vulnerable and are more likely to be victimized than ever before (Peters, 2009). Peters points out, women are particularly vulnerable to such predation: “You get young naïve women or the over-50 year olds who are recently divorced; they are often excited about meeting a new man and they make easy prey” (para. 6).

This supports Whitty’s (2008) argument that additional research is needed to better understand how online daters present themselves within cyberspace and what kinds of strategies they use while presenting themselves on ODSs, particularly with individuals seeking primarily casual encounters. Mascaro, Magee, and Goggins (2012) argue that ODSs’ roles and responsibilities in creating a venue for individuals seeking romantic partners is complex, and requires further investigation.

Taken as a whole, it might be argued that although ODSs offer online daters the potential for a perfect match, these daters are unaware of the risks and consequences of the degree of truthfulness in terms of the deceptive self-presentations of other daters (Kang et al., 2013; Lucid, 2009). Despite this issue, until now no major studies have been published in terms of the advantages and disadvantages of using ODSs for the purposes of finding a romantic partner (Whitty, 2011).

Importance of the Study

A research study of ODSs is important because everyone should learn whether ODSs are more effective than traditional dating. The results of this study can be used in

educational institutions to provide further information about the advantages and disadvantages of using ODSs, as well as the risks and consequences.

The past decade has seen the rapid development of ODSs in the world. In light of this fact, the popularity of ODSs has received significant focus amongst researchers. Some have considered which ways individuals present themselves online and how these individuals manage their online self-presentation in order to accomplish their goal (Ellison, Heino & Gibbs, 2006), used self-disclosure (Gibbs, Heino, Ellison, 2006), the problematic aspects of misrepresentation and deception in ODSs (Lucid, 2009 & Ellison et al., 2012), the role of photographs in online dating profiles (Toma et al., 2008) and the challenges of selecting a perfect romantic partner through ODSs described by (Heino et al., 2010).

Much of this research, however, has been descriptive and general in nature. There has been little evidence that demonstrates the extent to which online daters have become successful or how others were mostly unsuccessful in finding a potential partner (Houser, Horan, & Furler, 2008). Moreover, it is generally thought that seeking a romantic partner through ODSs might create social limitations in relationships (Schmitz et al., 2011), since finding a romantic partner through these sites has become such a frequent and time-consuming activity amongst daters (Brooks, 2011). Besides, many researchers also argue that self-presentation, self-disclosure, and deception in ODSs are serious issues, particularly due to the underlying anonymity of using these sites (Schmitz et al., 2011; Toma & Hancock, 2010).

In view of this fact, ODSs may knowingly or unknowingly encourage or, at least, create a venue where daters feel free to disclose inaccurate personal information to others

(Mesch, 2012). ODSs provide daters a confidential environment in which they can have more control over their self-presentation because, more specifically, physical contact and verbal cues are absent that otherwise would compel users to communicate more truthfully (Gibbs et al., 2011). It has been demonstrated that female daters are more likely to misrepresent their physical attractiveness, in particular, by including false photos in their profile, whereas male daters are more likely to misrepresent their marital status, relationship goals, physical appearance, height, and age (Mesch, 2012; Schmitz et al., 2013).

If the arguments are to be moved forward, the negative consequences related to deceptive self-presentation and self-disclosure in ODS environments require discussion. Considerable work needs to be done to determine the extent to which online daters can trust each other (Guadagno et al., 2012; Hancock & Toma, 2009). This statement is supported by Aretz, Demuth, Schmidt, and Vierlein (2010), who similarly argue that further research should be done to investigate trust-related concerns in the online environment, and that efforts must be made to protect the confidentiality of ODS daters' profiles, particularly daters with low self-esteem.

Purpose of the Study

Over the past decade, most research has addressed only the general phenomenon and mechanisms of ODSs, while few studies have explored reasons why individuals become involved in and present themselves on ODSs. However, the extant studies have focused almost exclusively on the general population of ODS users, and there has been little attention paid to specific populations, such as postsecondary students. The current study addresses this major gap in the literature.

The primary purpose of this thesis is to investigate ODS usage amongst postsecondary students. This thesis also examines the emerging role of three significant aspects of online profiles: self-presentation, self-disclosure, and deception. More specifically, this research seeks to address the following questions:

1. Why do postsecondary students become involved in ODSs?
2. How do postsecondary students present themselves on ODSs?

Rationale

Finding evidence through a review of the literature outlines how an increasing number of individuals seek romantic partners through ODSs for a variety of reasons (e.g., friendship, a long-term relationship, or marriage). Sautter, Tippet, and Morgan (2010) believe that seeking romantic partnerships through ODSs is not without conflict or risks, since not all online daters seek long-term commitments. Other critics have noted many daters use ODSs primarily to experience casual relationships or sexual partners (Barraket & Henry-Waring, 2008; Morgan et al., 2010; Sprecher, 2009).

Researchers in this area indicate how ODSs represent methodological problems, given how an individual seeks a partner on ODSs provides a further set of challenges (Hitsch, Hortacsu, & Ariely, 2010). For instance, selecting a romantic partner does not happen by chance because in some ODSs, (e.g., Match.com, eHarmony.com, and Chemistry.com), all daters must complete a long questionnaire so sites can “match” potential partners who have similar in characteristics such as age, marital status, desires, hobby, attitudes, and education (Ariely et al., 2010). Also, Houser, Horan, and Furler, (2008) argue:

If two strangers find one another socially and physically attractive, similar, and express behaviours that indicate liking, chances are that partners will seek a second interaction. What is unknown, however, is whether speed-daters utilize these same variables to assess their potential partners. Six minutes, after all, is not much time to ascertain a man or a woman's social attractiveness, attitude and background similarity, or effective use of immediacy behaviours. (p.750)

Then again, online daters may represent themselves ways that do not faithfully describe their real characteristics, or how others may expect they would be, given how they actually are (Houser et al., 2008).

Given this, taking into account data obtained from a review of the literature and understanding Sofia's ex-boyfriend's behaviour as a risk factor and disadvantage to the use of ODSs, I assumed that not all postsecondary students who use this non-traditional form of dating are aware of the potential dark hidden truths in ODS, and the possibility of dishonesty from and/or untruthful nature of some online daters. Lack of awareness about the nature of ODSs might create a negative impact on postsecondary students' emotional health and academic performance and contribute to low self-esteem, rejection, victimization, and a lack of trust in others. Also, few studies investigated the efficacy of online relationships that turned to offline interaction (Barraketa et al., 2008).

Taken as whole, as further outlined in the literature review, a lot of individuals use ODSs for a various purpose. With this knowledge, the underlying principle rationale of this study was to provide more awareness about advantages and disadvantages of using ODSs; to providing evidence about risks and consequences that are involved in using ODSs. Lastly, until recently there has been no reliable evidence that demonstrates the

degree to which postsecondary students can trust online daters. This study seeks to fill this gap.

Outline of the Research

Based on the above justification, and given this gap in the literature, the objective of this research is to create greater awareness about ODSs. The following chapters outline how the study intends to create such awareness.

Chapter 2 presents an overview of the literature related to the topic under study. This chapter is divided into three sections, which in turn are divided into subsections: (a) an overview of ODSs, including relevant ODS statistics; (b) why people use ODSs (traditional dating versus online dating, influence of media, cyber motivations, anonymity, social anxiety, trust, short-term relationships or casual encounters, or long-term relationships); and (c) how people present themselves in ODSs, including creating profiles in ODSs, image management in ODSs, use of attractive and unattractive photos in profiles, physical appearance in ODSs, linguistic in ODSs, self-presentation, misrepresentation, self-disclosure, and deceptive self-presentation in ODSs. The chapter ends with a summary of findings based on the review of literature in the area of ODSs.

Chapter 3 discusses the methodology—mixed methods with triangulation—used for this study. The chapter outlines the instrumentation (questionnaire and protocol interviews), pilot-testing of the instruments, site and participant selection, data collection procedures, and data analysis. It also discusses participant and site selection, as well as the study's validity, reliability, and ethical considerations.

Chapter 4 reflects on the main findings of the research, focusing on analysis and discussion of data that emerged from the questionnaire and interviews. Overall, this

chapter focuses on the study's two research questions and the following emerging themes: motivation, self-presentation, impact of ODSs on postsecondary students' lives, untrustworthy/safety concerns, deception/privacy concerns, and lack of trust.

Chapter 5 draws upon and summarizes the entire research study, including a discussion of the implications of the findings on future research in this area. The chapter also discusses the limitations of the study concludes with a brief summary and critique of the findings.

Chapter Summary

The prologue presented my personal statement including my primary motivation for choosing this topic—Sofia's story. Chapter 1 gave readers an idea of why my research is important and presented the research context, the background of the problem, and the rationale for the research. As well, Chapter 1 provided a statement of the context of the problem and the purpose for this research study. The chapter concluded by discussing the contents of subsequent chapters. The next chapter presents a review of literature related to the topic under study.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Several critics have noted that ODSs and online dating in general were rife with deception and viewed as a somewhat ineffective enterprise when they first appeared in the mid-1990s (Finkel et al., 2012; Lawson & Leck, 2006; Madden & Lenhart, 2006). Since the launch of Match.com in 1995, ODSs' popularity has grown exponentially and the number of daters using such sites for various purposes has continued to increase (Coleman, 2009). Mascaro et al. (2012) indicate that in 1999, a mere 2% of people used ODSs for the purpose of seeking a romantic partner, but as Gupta, Murtha, & Patel, (2012) reports significant numbers of people had registered on eHarmony by 2000. Oliveira (2010) indicates that 1.5 million people globally were members of PlentyofFish, with members exchanging over 380,000 messages per hour (Oliveira, 2010).

In 2000, more than 4% of daters in North America used ODSs to find romantic partners and as a means of pursuing and satisfying their sexual fantasies (Finkel et al., 2012; Wysocki & Childers, 2011), while the number grew to nearly 17% by 2005 (Mascaro et al., 2012). Madden and Lenhart's (2006) investigation revealed that approximately 16 million people frequented ODSs in 2006; over 43% of daters met a romantic partner through ODSs; nearly 17% of daters formed a long-term relationship or married their dating partner; and approximately 40% of young people aged 18-24 had sexual intercourse with a dater they met online. Other statistical evidence shows that FriendFinder.com had approximately 3.5 million active members globally in 2006 (Whitty, 2011), and nearly 31% of daters aged 20-54 met their partner through ODSs during 2006-2007 (Schaupp & Schaupp, 2012).

Dunn, Brinton, and Clark's (2010) cross-cultural study showed that over 40 million people in North America used ODSs in 2009, while other investigations revealed that online daters spent considerable amounts of time and money on ODSs (Alam, Yeow, & Loo, 2011; Coleman, 2009; Mascaro et al., 2012; Sritharan, Heilpern, Wilbur, & Gawronski, 2010). ODSs had become ever more popular by 2011, and approximately 35% of individuals looking for romantic partners on ODSs spend more time doing so on these media than they do in a traditional manner in the "real world" (Norcie, De Cristofaro, & Bellotti, 2013).

As of today, nearly 34 million people have visited Match.com, Yahoo, and eHarmony (Alam et al., 2011; Couch et al., 2012; Skopek, Schulz, & Blossfield, 2011), with the highest usage (78%) in North America (Finkel et al., 2012; Oliveira, 2010). Finkel et al. (2012) have shown that eHarmony, Match.com, and Chemistry.com are ranked as the first, second, and third most popular ODSs, respectively, amongst their users (Finkel et al., 2012). Finally, approximately 120,000 marriages a year were formed as a result of dating through ODSs (Dunn et al., 2010).

Why People Use ODSs

Henry-Waring and Barraketa (2008) note that: "online interaction is part of the *real* world, not separate from it, and thus the consequences for people who choose to go online and to be intimate are *real*, and not imaginary." (p. 27)

Traditional Dating Versus Online Dating

A few decades ago, traditional methods to find loving, romantic relationships or sexual partners usually entailed being introduced to or meeting people through friends, family, people at church, school, the workplace, or through social events, which,

sometimes, resulted in marriage and beginning a family (Finke et al., 2012; Lucid, 2009; Overby, Slaughter, & Konsynski, 2010; Sprecher, 2009; Wysocki & Childers, 2011).

Lucid (2009) notes in the middle of the 20th century daters often placed personal announcements in newspapers to look for romantic partners. However, research has shown that since seeking partners through such media could result in social embarrassment, much of daters' personal information was often narrowed to things like hobbies and favourite activities (Lee, Sun, & Thiry, 2011). Consequently, such profiles did not include photographs (de Vries, 2010) as a way to minimize embarrassment while seeking romantic partners through newspaper advertisements (Finkel et al., 2012). Currently, the various features and services offered by ODSs have played a key role in their increasing popularity amongst individuals involved in interactive relationships (Wysocki & Childers, 2011).

Frost, Chance, Norton, and Ariely (2008) surveyed 132 online daters and found that they spent considerably more time screening other daters' profiles, corresponding with them by text message and/or email than they did in traditional ways—that is, via telephone or face-to-face meetings. But again, from online daters' perspectives, despite cost and time, ODSs are the most practical method through which they can interact with a larger pool of daters and find a romantic partner (Frost et al., 2008). ODSs, therefore, have made a significant impact on daters seeking romantic partners through their sites (Sprecher, 2009) since ODSs are conducive to more selective self-presentation for individuals interested in offline meetings (Heino et al., 2010). Also, such online relationships are formed more quickly and intimately than offline relationships due to the anonymous nature of communication through ODSs (Alam et al., 2011). Overall, due to

the ubiquitous nature of the Internet, ODSs have become and continue to be far more accessible than ever before (Finkel et al., 2012), and the development of relationships between daters on ODSs has surpassed traditional ways of forming relationships (Heino et al., 2010).

Given this, Sritharan et al. (2010) have shown that although ODSs cannot guarantee success for the approximately three million users seeking a perfect match, 62% of online daters have found a romantic partner. The question remains, however, if these daters are ideally matched, since creating false profiles is particularly easy as ODSs do not verify the validity of users' profile text and photographs (Stanier et al., 2010). Regardless of this issue, Gibbs et al. (2011) reported that approximately 10 million Americans have an online profile on at least one ODS, such as eHarmony or Match.com.

Rosen et al.'s (2008) survey of 759 online daters show that 51% of daters stated they had a face-to-face meeting with a potential online partner within a short period of time. A similar investigation conducted by Sritharan et al. (2010) suggests that some daters had offline interactions either on the phone or face-to-face, while others found a short- or a long-term relationship with a romantic partner whom they had met through ODSs. Another survey-based study showed that in 2011, over 40 million daters have used an ODS (StatisticBrain.com, 2012), and we can surmise that these daters were looking for a potential partner for a short- or a long-term relationship (Whitty, 2011) or marriage (Bapna, Ramaprasad, Shmueli & Umyarov, 2012). Ultimately, in the past few decades, millions of daters have become involved in ODSs to find their respective partners (Bak, 2010; Finkel et al., 2012).

Influence of Media

Recently researchers have examined the effects of advertisements of ODSs through media on daters seeking potential partners for various purposes, and how these commercials might influence daters' motivation to choose and/or use one of these ODSs. Finkel et al. (2012) recognized that ODSs' advertisements through media have an impact on daters' decision-making. In other words, the majority of these announcements suggest that daters not only have a better chance of finding a romantic partner (Finkel et al., 2012; Sprecher, 2009), but can also find such partners much faster than through traditional dating methods (Heino et al. 2010). According to these sites' promotional material, they provide "perfect matches" more rapidly than traditional methods (Rege, 2009), offer intensive research, and guarantee anonymity (Bapna et al., 2012).

According to the PlentyofFish ODS's advertisements, daters can access up to "145 million monthly visitors," which differs from other sites (Finkel et al., 2012, p. 4), and more than one million female daters use PlentyofFish because of its free services (Frohlick & Migliardi, 2011). Other interesting findings show that Match.com provides its users the opportunity to express themselves through text messages (Finkel et al., 2012), allows online daters the opportunity to choose what information they disclose (Gibbs et al., 2006), allows users to add up to 26 photos to their profile (Finkel et al., 2012), and lets online daters review a large pool of profiles of potential partners of interest (Tomlinson, 2013). Furthermore, Match.com states that all interaction between daters is through an "anonymous" email network (Match.com, 2014). According to Match.com (2014), all personal information of daters remains confidential until the daters decide to share their information with each other, and the site offers its services in 12

different languages through more than 37 countries. As a result, nearly 15 million daters use Match.com (Schaupp & Schaupp, 2012).

Other sites, such as E-Harmony, claim that their services provide not only a venue for dating but also a guarantee of perfect matches (Finkel et al., 2012); E-Harmony claims that between 2008-2009, more than 542 of their daters married (Schaupp & Schaupp, 2012). Finally, OkCupid states that its services facilitates searching for partners in conventional ways (e.g., accessibility and availability at all times), and provides perfect matches to millions of their daters (Finkel et al, 2012).

Several studies describe ODSs as a thriving and profitable business (Coleman 2009), since not all of these sites are free of charge (Brooks, 2011; Shtatfeld & Barak, 2009). Henry-Waring and Barraket (2008) reported that advertisement for finding a partner acquired great economic relevance in 2005-2006 in Europe, where ODSs have become highly profitable businesses, and their economic profile grows between €160 million to €228 million. This evidence confirms that each year millions of optimistic daters use ODSs, and they often spend considerable time and money for the privilege of seeking a romantic partner (Brooks, 2011; Coleman, 2009; Finkel et al., 2012).

Based on ODSs' advertisements, it appears all of the sites, whether paid or unpaid, use market metaphors to attract daters to their sites. Also, one of the advantages of these ODSs advertisements is they provide users with options to determine which of the sites is more convenient for their needs and goals (Fiore et al., 2010; Sautter et al., 2010). Accordingly, many daters turn to ODSs in the hope of finding a romantic partner, despite the costs, and daters' interactions increasingly are communicated by means of

ODSs (Fiore et al., 2010), offering for many the hope of an eventual long-term relationship and/or a marriage (Gibbs et al., 2006).

Cyber Motivations

Finding love and/or an intimacy partner has become an important aspect of individuals' life, and contemporary ODSs have changed how individuals date and find partners (Henry-Waring & Barraketa, 2008). Generally speaking, ODSs are becoming a primary option for a lot of daters (Couch et al., 2012; Finkel et al. 2012). On the other hand, despite the apparent benefit of readily available personal connections, online daters have to contend with a large number of options and spend a considerable amount of both time and money to select their desired romantic partner (Brooks, 2011).

To better understand cyber-motivations in ODSs environments, Wang and Chang (2010) created a Cyber-Relationship Motive Scale to determine daters' motivation to use ODSs. The result of their investigation demonstrated that anonymity, the opportunity to meet a romantic partner, informal communications, curiosity, emotional support, and sexual liaisons are common motives for using ODSs (Wang & Chang, 2010).

Other researchers cite additional factors regarding ODS users' cyber motivations. For instance, some daters may be influenced by their peers (Toma & Hancock, 2010), have increased freedom of choice in finding a romantic partner from a large pool of profiles (Lawson & Leck, 2006), and may not have time to meet a romantic partner through social events due to their busy professional lives or because they have relocated to new areas and have not developed a social network in their day-to-day lives (Barraket & Henry-Waring, 2008).

Rege's (2009) in-depth investigation of online daters' motivation to use ODSs reveals the following distinctive categories: first, daters do not need to leave their home or workplace to find a romantic partner. Second, ODSs are accessible 24 hours per day, 7 days per week, thus online daters can scan other profiles at their convenience. Third, anonymity allows daters to share their confidence in private with others. Lastly, ODSs allow daters to gain new experiences of communicating with each other through instant messaging, live chats and the use of emoticons (e.g., @, ;), -, etc.) (Rege, 2009).

Anonymity

Questions have been raised about how ODSs influence daters' motivations. Alam et al. (2011) believe that ODSs' impact on daters' motivations is more complex than previously thought; however, it appears that these sites provide a more pleasant alternative to search for potential romantic partners when compared with traditional ways. Therefore, individuals' ads in newspapers are no longer socially suitable as a tool for finding romantic partners (Finkel et al., 2012) because ODSs allows daters to achieve their goal and/or need for anonymity, and are also faster than traditional methods (Reyns, Burek, Henso, & Fisher, 2013; Rosen et al., 2008).

In the literature, several studies have explored the ways in which anonymity has impacted the ODSs usage. For instance, Sheeks and Birchmeier (2007) and McKenna, (2008) are interested in discovering more about the mechanisms of anonymity in ODS environments and their effects. The results of their studies demonstrated that anonymity in ODS contexts not only provides online daters with the opportunity to practice cyber management, but also with an "icebreaker" to make intimate personal proposals that would often not take place so soon in offline meetings. In the same vein, Mascaro et al.

(2012) point out how anonymity in ODSs not only provides the opportunity to find romantic partners, but also allow daters to form intimate connections. As Coleman (2009) noted, because ODSs allow daters to represent themselves anonymously, ODSs are considered safer places to find romantic partners. Consequently, ODSs have become a socially acceptable means of meeting a romantic partner (Kang & Hoffman, 2011).

Finally, Couch et al. (2012) sought to better understand why ODSs have become popular amongst daters. The researchers outlined their evidence and found that self-determination from commitment, freedom over self-presentation, and anonymity of self-disclosure through these sites represent greater opportunities for finding romantic partners than could be achieved through more traditional methods. But as noted earlier, although ODSs have become an acceptable way to find romantic partners, a number of concerns have been identified; some of the most significant issues relate to rejection and the physical dangers that may occur when offline meetings are arranged (Stanier, Naicken, Basu, Li, & Wakeman, 2010).

Social Anxiety

In spite of some disadvantages mentioned previously, the effects of ODSs can be useful for some daters, especially where it has been suggested that ODSs are largely used by daters with social anxiety, isolated, and/or by daters with low self-esteem. Therefore, such daters become more involved in ODSs in the hope of forming a relationship. As far as the positive effects of general usage ODSs are concerned, the most relevant contributions are presented by a few researchers. Focusing on these contributions, Finkel et al. (2012) see how these sites provide possible contacts to potential partners whom

certain daters (i.e., with low self-esteem and/or social anxiety) would not likely meet through more traditional ways.

According to Whitty's (2008) definition, daters with social anxiety have difficulty building relationships in offline environments due to shyness or an inability to maintain normal interpersonal interactions. Whitty's view is supported by McKenna (2008), who states that for daters unhappy with their physical appearance, shyness and social anxiety are often barriers during initial face-to-face interactions. As well as the results of investigation of the usage of ODSs between online daters with social anxiety and/or low self-esteem and other daters, the positive effect of ODSs are represented researchers as follows: those with social anxiety have been perceived as being desperate when looking for romantic partners through traditional methods because their social interaction was often unsuccessful (Barraket & Henry-Waring, 2008); daters with social anxiety and unattractive physical appearances are more likely to use ODSs than daters with high self-esteem (Peter and Valkenburg, 2007); college students with low self-esteem are more comfortable having an online relationship than through traditional ways (Sheeks and Birchmeier, 2007); and daters with social anxiety might have difficulty developing a relationship offline, due to their heightened feelings of isolation (Aretz et al., 2010).

In light of these findings, a general conclusion in the existing literature on this subject is daters with social anxiety have a better opportunity to find a partner through ODSs than traditional ways due to anonymity (Kim, Kwon, & Lee, 2009). According to Kang and Hoffman (2011), anonymity is the primary reason why online daters who might have social anxiety and/or low self-esteem might use ODSs more than other methods to meet potential partners. Nevertheless, it would be interesting to investigate the degree to

which online daters with social anxiety and/or with low self-esteem trust ODSs, and to determine the efficacy of ODSs for these daters in comparison with traditional methods (Schaupp & Schaupp 2012).

Trust

Through the modern technology of ODSs, finding a Mr. or Ms. right is becoming a fundamental objective for many online daters (Henry-Waring and Barraket, 2008), although the most common concerns amongst online daters are trust and other daters' misrepresentation, to the extent that some daters believe that the first face-to-face meeting acts as a screening process (Whitty, 2011). Houser et al. (2008) see how online daters are able to determine, in a short time, the attitudes, behaviours, and background of a potential partner and trust them, while Kang et al. (2013) claim that online daters have to scrutinize an ever-greater quantity of profiles to find what they want. The question remains: "How does trust play a role in ODSs for finding perfect romantic partners?"

Although more truthful self-disclosure takes place during offline interactions when daters can verify the information given by their potential partners (Whitty, 2011), there are still emotional concerns and possible physical risks when meeting face-to-face with daters who are extremely untrustworthy and, potentially, dangerous (Couch et al., 2012). There is the strong belief, however, that many online daters trust ODSs (Gibbs et al., 2006; Whitty 2008), and many are concerned that these sites allow them to encounter a large pool of daters whom they have not formally met (Finkel et al., 2012). This finding confirms that ODSs have become an opportune alternative for forming short- or long-term relationships (Alam et al., 2011).

Short-Term Relationships or Casual Encounters

Whitty (2008) remind us there are still daters seeking a partner through traditional ways, (e.g., meeting through family or social events). More recent research suggests that the preferred way to meet romantic partners is through ODSs, which have become a worldwide tool and are replacing traditional methods of meeting romantic partners (Schaupp & Schaupp, 2012; Finkel et al., 2012). The new method of encountering romantic partners through ODSs offers the promise of finding a charming partner and forming an established relationship (Houser et al. 2008), but ODSs also constitute an easy way to find a partner for short-term relationships or casual encounters (Gibbs et al., 2011).

In the absence of relevant evidence in the empirical literature that justifies the behavior of daters who use ODS for short-term relationships, Couch and Liamputtong (2008) suggest that in comparison with a long-term relationship, a short-term relationship can be defined as seeking a sexual partner. To better understand online daters' motivations (i.e., who are seeking a partner for a short-term relationship), Couch and Liamputtong conducted in-depth interviews with fifteen participants involved with ODSs. The result of their investigation showed the majority of participants reported that they used at least one of ODSs for finding a sexual partner as the primary reason.

Couch and Liamputtong (2008) also sought to determine whether some online daters become involved in ODSs for the purpose of meeting sexual partners. The result of their investigation has shown that some daters look for casual encounters or one-night stands through ODSs, such as RSVP, Adult Play and Date (APD) and Find A Date (FAD). As well, many other scholars hold the view that not all daters seek a partner for a

simple relationship; some ODS users seek casual encounters or a potential sexual partner (Peter & Valkenburg, 2007). Alam et al. (2012) indicate that male daters have a greater tendency to seek casual encounters than female daters. Based on evidence provided by Couch et al. (2012) on individuals using ODSs for casual encounters may involve certain risks, including unwanted pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections, and sexual violence that may arise when meeting a potential partner offline.

Long-Term Relationships

According to the existing literature, finding a long-term relationship is the most promising and desired result from ODS services. Prior to 1990, almost no daters met online, however, current ODS usage has become widespread (Peter & Valkenburg 2007). General speaking, ODSs could be the results of the online daters' desire for originality and/or variety of options, where a lot of daters are highly motivated to use these sites to find romantic partners, notably to find a marriage partner for establishing a family (Finkel et al., 2012; Kim et al., 2009; Gibbs et al., 2011).

Some empirical evidence on the subject of finding a long-term relationship through ODSs has been discussed. Rosen et al.'s (2008) online survey showed that nearly 23% of daters used ODSs to develop long-term relationships and over 10% had used these sites to find a marriage partner. Gunter's (2008) investigation of more than 3,800 online daters showed that 29% reported they used at least one ODS, 43% had a sexual relationship with a partner met online, and 9% found a marriage partner through ODSs.

Smith and Duggan's (2013) recent study has also provided evidence that nearly approximately 66% of daters state they met a romantic partner through these sites, and almost 23% of respondents reported that they had formed a long-term relationship with or

married a partner they had met through ODSs. Fiore et al.'s (2010) and Hall, Park, Song, and Cody's (2010) work showed that female daters typically seek a long-term partner for the purpose of forming a family, while male daters are mostly interested in finding occasional relationships, while DeAndrea, Tom Tong, Liang, Levine, and Walther's (2012) perspective is that ODSs allow daters to develop relationships that may not be likely through offline interactions.

On the other hand, according to the interpretations proposed by other existing studies in the area of ODSs, finding a long-term relationship is still the main goal of ODS use, in spite of increasing usage of these sites for developing any kind of intimate relationships (Barraket, et al., 2008). According to Henry-Waring and Barraketa (2008), there are always risks to meeting a potential partner from online offline. Schaupp and Schaupp (2012) provide one of the possible risks and consequences as embedded financial and time costs, while others have noted the stigma of rejection (Stanier et al., 2010; Kang & Hoffman, 2011). Lu (2008) adds that although many ODS users are given false hope by potential partners pretending to seek a serious relationship while being interested merely in casual encounters, many users, as Kang and Hoffman (2011) observe, still persist in their online search for a long-term romantic partner through ODSs.

Besides recognizing the relevance of disadvantages from using ODSs, a critical challenge is not clear in why a lot of daters use these sites in the hope of finding a potential partner for a short-term or a long-term relationship and/or a marriage partner (Couch et al., 2012; Fiore et al., 2010). Therefore, additional studies should be conducted

to find out how these daters can trust others in ODSs in the hope of finding a perfect match for long-term and/or marriage partnerships (Guadagno et al., 2012).

How People Present Themselves in ODSs

In the following, a number of the issues surrounding self-presentation on ODSs will be considered in turn.

Creating Profiles in ODSs

Like so-called traditional relationship-building, relationships in online settings develop through various stages (Sprecher, 2009), one of the most important of which is the initial interaction. This means almost all ODSs require online daters to create a personal profile (Ellison et al., 2012). The profile includes demographic and self-descriptive information (with the option of adding photographs) that help explain users' qualities and lifestyles (Ellison et al., 2012) and specify the type of romantic partner daters are seeking (Fiore et al., 2010).

Furthermore, even though all daters must provide a user name, some daters use pseudonyms for their profile, so personal information remains anonymous (Peters & Valkenburg, 2007) up to the point of establishing an offline relationship (Barraket & Henry-Waring, 2008). Once the procedure of creating the profile is accomplished, these profiles can be reviewed by other daters (Sprecher, 2009). Whitty (2011) coined the term "screen name" when referring to daters' use of pseudonyms—including names like "Greatbody," "Hottie," "Wellread," or "Welleducated"—that convey users' personality and becomes part of their self-presentation (p. 226).

Finally, it has been found that daters attempt to represent a perfect image of themselves when creating their online profiles (Ellison, et al., 2012; Hall et al., 2010;

Norcie et al., 2013). However, in an investigation interested in the contents of online profiles, Ellison et al. (2006) found that often information provided by online daters differs from what becomes known once an offline interaction is formed. It has also been suggested that the contents of online profiles of daters who seek sexual relationships are unlike other daters' profiles who seek a romantic partner for a long-term relationship and/or a marriage partner (Morgan, Richards, & Van Ness, 2010).

Image Management in ODSs

Hancock and Toma's (2009) define image management in ODSs as self-presentation that conveys the perfect image of self through the inclusion of photographs or specific goals (i.e., what online daters are seeking) in users' profiles. Ellison et al. (2012) also comment on image management and state that the primary connection between daters is established through instant messaging and email. According to Peters and Valkenberg (2007) image management in ODSs is important since online daters are motivated to express intimate personal details freely through such electronic communication.

Online daters are often concerned with contacting a partner who is physically attractive and has common interests; these features are used to attract a potential partner (Houser et al., 2008). In view of this, many empirical studies have focused on self-presentation and the role of self-disclosure in the context of ODSs (Gibbs et al., 2006; Rosen et al., 2008), how online daters manage self-presentation procedures in ODSs (Ellison et al., 2012), and the impact of deception in online dating environments (Ellison et al., 2012, Guadagno et al., 2012, Hall et al., 2010; Toma et al., 2008; Toma & Hancock, 2012; Whitty, 2008). Further, as noted earlier, evidence suggests that ODSs

facilitate deceptive behaviour because online daters have direct and complete control over self-presentation, which is a problem endemic to ODSs' (Hitsch et al., 2010; Nye, 2012). Furthermore, such self-presentation strategies might also have a negative impact on daters' subsequent offline interactions due to the lack of trust that may stem from daters' discovery of previous misrepresentation by their potential partners on online profiles.

Photographs in ODSs—Online Profiles

Almost every study published on the subject of ODSs refers to the use of photographs in online profiles. A number of researchers (e.g., Bak, 2010; Couch & Liamputtong, 2008; Fiore et al., 2008; Lee et al., 2011; Mascaro et al., 2012; Whitty, 2011) have sought to identify how daters present themselves on ODSs and what type of self-presentation is more likely to be successful, as well as how such representation results in the development of an offline relationship.

Bak (2010), Whitty (2011) and Toma & Hancock, (2010) make distinctions between profiles with attractive and unattractive photos and suggest that attractive profile photos play an important role in decision making amongst daters, meaning daters with physical attractiveness are greatly valued in mate selection. Bak (2010) adds that photographs play a fundamental role in online profiles, although online daters are often challenged with other daters' deceptive self-presentation by the use of inaccurate profile photos. Even though ODSs have thousands of profiles, researchers recognize that profile photos, in particular attractive photos, have a great impact on how daters' profiles will be judged (de Vries, 2010; Finkel et al., 2012; Hitsch et al., 2010).

Hancock and Toma (2009) examined the use of photos in ODS profiles and indicate that less attractive daters improve the desirability of their profile by posting attractive photographs. Similarly, de Vries (2010) has suggested that online daters use attractive photos for their profile because the majority of them are aware that others are more likely to view photos than read profiles. As such, female ODS daters' photos often do not represent their current age or were altered and/or taken by professional photographers (Hancock & Toma, 2009). As well, Toma and Hancock (2010) investigated photographs of online daters to compare the latter photos with the daters' actual photos. The result of their investigation demonstrated that 5% of female and 4% of male daters have what were deemed less physical attractive features and used fake photos in their profiles.

Gibbs et al. (2011) conducted a similar of investigation and found that due to the lack of physical contact and verbal communication that may otherwise expose these subterfuges, the majority of online daters misrepresent themselves in their profiles, particularly by posting inaccurate photos. Fiore et al. (2008) noted that frequently daters view profiles with attractive photos as belonging to ideal romantic partners, and individuals who post such photos are contacted more often than those who include less attractive photos. As a result, finding a perfect match amongst thousands of profile might prove quite challenging (Witty, 2008), given that it would take considerable time not only to find a so-called perfect match, but also an accurate profile (Ellison et al., 2012).

Still, no studies have yet determined if such attractive profiles and/or compatibility matches necessarily mean that the ODS user will have other positive qualities, such as social skills and aptitudes (Brand et al., 2012).

Physical Appearance in ODSs—Online Profiles

Prior research reported that during initial interactions, the gender of online daters might affect their communication behavior: female daters are often shown an instant attraction before any verbal exchange occurred in the second contact (i.e., through offline interaction, due to their physical appearance) (Houser et al., 2008).

Physical appearance, therefore, plays an important role in ODS environments, and some researchers acknowledge that attractive daters with shapely physical appearances are considered more desirable and have a better chance to attract a romantic partner than unattractive daters (Morgan et al., 2010; Sritharan et al., 2010; Toma & Hancock, 2010; Whitty, 2008). On the other hand, it has also been found that male daters are more inclined to judge physical attractiveness in female daters than females do in judging male daters (Bak, 2010). This view is supported by Whitty (2011) who identified that physical appearance is an important aspect of attraction amongst online daters, since the majority of online daters are more selective when including attractive photos on their profiles. Therefore, self-presentation in ODS environments has become a problematic subject amongst online daters; for this reason, a lot of online daters have control over their self-presentation, which means they use various self-presentation strategies (Ellison et al., 2012).

Returning to the role of physical appearance in ODSs, Toma et al. (2008) carried out a number of investigations into self-presentation on ODSs, including one that examined the physical appearance of 80 online daters described on their respective profiles, such as height, weight, and actual age. The results of Toma et al.'s investigation demonstrated that nine out of 10 online daters lied about their physical appearance for

various purposes (e.g., to compensate for online daters' low self-esteem or insecurities over characteristics like being overweight).

Couch et al. (2012) conducted in-depth interviews online with 29 participants to investigate the risks and consequences of using ODSs. Their results revealed that the major concern of online daters is dishonesty in daters' self-presentation, such as fake photos, physical appearance, age, height, and weight. Therefore, dishonest practices related to physical appearance, including the use of inaccurate photos in profiles, are considered important tools for online daters who seek to increase their chances of attracting a romantic partner among a large pool of ODS profiles (Lo, Hsieh, & Chiu, 2013).

Linguistics in ODSs—Online Profiles

Heino et al. (2010) define linguistics in ODS environments—the amount of personal information exchanged between online daters, often measured using words—as a strategy of self-concept for better interaction with other daters. Fiore et al.'s (2010) investigation into the use of linguistics in online profiles demonstrated the relationship between self-presentation and language in online contexts. Fiore et al. calculated the percentage of words that online daters used for their self-descriptive profile text. Results of this investigation make obvious that female daters use more words in their profiles related to general ideals such as children and emotion, whereas male daters use more words about their professional status (Fiore et al., 2010).

Other studies also attempted to explain the role of linguistics in online profiles. For instance, Toma and Hancock (2012) conducted two investigations. The first sought to discover whether deceptions in online dating profiles related to the way online daters

describe themselves in their profiles. The results of their investigation showed that deceptions were established through linguistic cues relating to emotions and to strategic efforts to improve their self-presentations. Toma and Hancock's second investigation examined what online daters write, which is different when they are being deceitful. Further, writing styles are often manipulated (e.g., writing emotional words), which had an impact on online daters' self-presentation (Toma and Hancock, 2012).

Rosen et al. (2008) sought to find out if the use of emotional words during self-disclosure has an impact on online daters' decision-making when selecting their desired romantic partner. The result of their investigation confirmed that strong emotionality affected daters' perception toward potential partners. For instance, writing an email using emotional words such as "wonderful" and "excited" had more positive impressions than an email with less emotional traits, such as "happy" and "well" (Rosen et al. 2008).

The greatest number of online daters are more attracted to skilled writers than less skilled writers, specifically online daters who express themselves with precise syntax and writing styles (i.e., fluent grammar and coherent, clear sentences are considered to reflect romantic partners with more positive qualities than others) (Shtatfeld & Barak, 2009).

Self-Presentation in ODSs

In light of findings from existing literature comparing self-presentation in the traditional world versus ODSs, Lee et al. (2011) suggest that in contrast to self-presentation in traditional modes, self-presentation in ODS environments consists of creating profiles that are representative and portray a desirable image of self that online daters disclose to attract other daters. Ellison et al. (2006) investigated differences between self-presentation in the so-called traditional world and ODSs and found that the

latter provide an innovative opportunity for daters to improve their self-presentation using various strategies, such as adding an attractive photo in their profile. Ellison et al.'s (2012) more recent survey gathered qualitative data from 37 online dater participants to determine differences between online profiles and offline self-presentations. The results of their investigations demonstrated that in ODS contexts, creating perfect personal profiles is important for daters since these profiles constitute an opening for future offline relationships (Ellison et al., 2012). This might suggest that male daters are more likely to show interest in younger females, whereas female daters' preference is for males either their own age or slightly older than themselves (Couch & Liamputtong, 2008).

Peters and Valkenburg's (2007) study of self-presentation in ODS environments reveals that physical attractiveness in some cases plays a less important role in online dating environments than in face-to-face interaction, which, according to Witty (2011), may also depend on daters' motivation. For instance, anonymity encourages online daters to discuss delicate topics, such as sexual desires (Peter & Valkenburg, 2007). Then again, it has been shown that online daters are unaware of the risk and consequences of disclosing their personal information when creating their profiles (Bak, 2010).

Data from others sources (e.g., Gibbs et al., 2011; Whitty, 2008) have identified that most online daters are concerned about how they present themselves on ODSs since they know they are being scrutinized (i.e., judged) by other daters. This point is underscored by Frost et al.'s (2008) survey of approximately 132 online daters which demonstrated that, in general, online daters spend more time viewing other daters' profiles and communicating with romantic partners via email than they do through more traditional methods (again, telephone conversations or face-to-face meetings).

Taken as whole, self-presentation through ODSs is a fundamental concern for the majority of online daters (Hancock & Toma, 2009). As a result, photographs and text messages are the most important part of self-presentation (Fiore et al., 2008); importantly, Lee et al. (2011) highlight this because these media may most clearly represent users' projected identity that others will interpret according to their expectations. In contrast to self-presentation in traditional world, another important aspect of self-presentation online is choosing attractive photos for a personal profile, since online daters with attractive photos can increase their chances to be chosen at first view by other daters (Bak, 2010; Whitty, 2011).

ODSs have pressured daters to present themselves as attractive as possible, affecting individuals' behaviour in creating their online profiles (Schmitz et al., 2013). Consequently, posting attractive photos is considered important for ODS users' self-presentation, whereas actual physical appearance and adequate verbal communication skills have greater significance in a traditional dating environment (Jiang, Bazarova, & Hancock, 2013).

In view of all that has been mentioned so far, it is clear that ODSs are becoming an important source for finding romantic partners, and online daters are often willing to provide specific details about themselves, including photographic images (Finkel et al., 2012). To confirm this point of view, Finkel et al. and Whitty (2011) suggest that online daters with social anxiety and who experience loneliness are willing to reveal more personal details and information and post false photos because they believe doing so will increase interaction in both online and possible offline relationships. Further, online daters who are interested in short-term relationships might be more likely to exaggerate

their self-presentation to attract a large number of potential partners. Others who are interested in long-term relationships might be more likely to present themselves as credibly as possible (Toma & Hancock, 2010).

Misrepresentation in ODSs

Various definitions of misrepresentation are found in the literature corresponding to self-presentation. According to Ellison et al. (2012) and Guadagno et al. (2012), misrepresentation can be defined as an inappropriate or deceptive representation of self. Schmitz et al. (2013) argue that online daters use misrepresentation not only to choose selectively who they decide to engage in a relationship, but Ellison et al. (2012) also suggest daters misrepresent because they believe it will increase chances of being chosen first as a perfect match by other daters (Ellison et al., 2012). This view is supported by Toma et al. (2008) who argue that male daters often have a tendency to lie about their height, personal resources, relationship objectives, personal interests, and personal characteristics, while female daters lie about their physical appearance, such as weight. In the same vein, Guadagno et al. (2012) state this is true since the intention behind the deceptive self-presentation in ODS environments is to appear more attractive to others. Similar to all of these view, it has been argued that some online daters feel more comfortable with their misrepresentation in ODSs, because most daters' profiles are measured to determine if they are a perfect match for others (Fiore et al., 2010).

With this in mind, untruthful self-presentation or misrepresentation can be characterized as simple ignorance about oneself (DeAndrea et al., 2012), assuming that online daters begin lying for a variety of reasons, such as being influenced by other daters or due to the absence of nonverbal cues (Hancock & Toma 2009). The most common

misrepresentation in ODS contexts is adding false photographs into the profile (Ellison et al., 2012; Hall et al., 2010); as a result, profiles often contain fake photographs more than other false personal information, such as the number of children and/or educational and marital status (Toma & Hancock, 2010).

DeAndrea et al. (2012) maintained that ODSs allow daters to have more control over their self-presentation, personal identities, and background due to the anonymous nature of the ODSs (Hall et al., 2010); Toma & Hancock (2010) indicate most daters lie about their self-presentation regarding one or more of their physical attributes. To better understand the mechanisms of misrepresentation in ODS environments, Toma et al. (2008) analyzed online daters' profiles—particularly related to daters' height and weight—and found that nine out of ten daters had lied about weight (5%), age (1.5%), and height (1.1%). Female daters often tended to reduce their weight, whereas male daters increased their height. As a result, according to Toma et al., the majority of daters do not accurately present themselves in online profiles, and the foremost misrepresentation corresponded to relationship goals, personal interests, personal attributes, and weight.

Although similarity of opinions amongst researchers confirm that online daters often misrepresent themselves by presenting false personal information related to height, weight, and age, or by using old and/or misleading photos (Whitty, 2008), understanding online daters' motivation for misrepresenting themselves on ODSs is a complex process (Hall et al., 2010). On the other hand, Gibbs et al. (2011) established that the majority of daters are unaware of what to disclose, to whom they should send personal information,

and are uncertain if other users disclose truthfully in return, all of which might provoke negative consequences, such as mistrust.

Best and Delmege (2012) indicate that although research suggests the quest for intimate relationships is an important factor influencing how online daters present themselves on ODSs, there is a lack of research in the field that explains why dishonesty is becoming an increasingly prevalent practice on ODSs. Therefore, it is not only misrepresenting personal information such as physical appearance that is problematic; adding deceptively attractive photo in profiles provokes problematic feelings and events for online daters (Ellison et al., 2012). More specifically, online profile photos provide a visual cue, and have an important impact on daters' perceptions (Brand et al., 2012).

Many other researchers would agree that more often online daters intentionally use misrepresentation and deception to charm a greater number of potential romantic partners, but they are not as vigilant about the dishonesty that may be perpetrated by such potential partners (Guadagno et al., 2012). And once again, other studies have suggested one of the major motivations for misrepresentation is ODS users' tendency to enhance the representation of their physical features through the inclusion of inaccurate photos in their respective profiles. Often, female daters assume that adding attractive and/or false photos in their profiles will increase their chances of being chosen in the first place (Couch et al., 2012; Skopek et al., 2011; Sweeney & Borden, 2009). In contrast, Lucid (2009) has shown that although misrepresentation is a common strategy of self-presentation among daters, not all online daters use deceptive self-presentation, and some online daters are likely to use more dishonesty in traditional dating than through online dating.

Self-Disclosure in ODSs

Gibbs et al. (2006) were apparently the first to define self-disclosure in ODS contexts as the act of revealing personal information to others. This definition is close to those of other researchers who define self-disclosure as a procedure of communication through which daters disclose information about themselves to attract a large pool of daters (Bak, 2010; Gibbs et al., 2011; Rosen et al., 2008). One example of self-disclosure is that online daters often present themselves as interesting, an attractive dater, outgoing, and an ideal romantic partner (Schmitz et al., 2013).

Morgan et al. (2010) conducted an interview with approximately 294 online daters (aged 18-34) with the goal of identifying how self-disclosure in ODS environments might impact the contents of online daters' profiles. The researchers found three categories—physical, lifestyle, and individual characteristics—that were primary keys of the daters' self-disclosure. For instance, in contrast to younger daters who tend to express their physical attributes, older daters had a tendency to describe their lifestyle.

Gibbs et al. (2006) examined the role of self-disclosure on the perceived success of dating through ODSs in order to classify characteristics of online daters who use self-disclosure in their profiles. The researchers surveyed 349 members of Match.com and the results of their investigation have shown that some online daters' self-disclosure had a negative impact on their offline relationships, while for others self-disclosure facilitated their offline relationships.

Whitty (2011) concurs with this view and, as noted earlier, believes that a lot of daters tend to present a perfect image of themselves in order to attract more partners. Consequently, daters use self-presentation strategies (i.e., self-disclosure) as the primary

tool to attract potential partners who are most compatibly matched based on personality traits and physical appearance (Rege, 2009; Whitty, 2008). Couch and Liamputtong (2008) & Mascaro et al. (2012) discuss the challenges of self-disclosure, and argue that most daters use self-disclosure to present a perfect profile of themselves in their goal of meeting a romantic partner.

Deceptive Self-Presentation in ODSs

Deception is used by Lucid (2009) to refer to online daters who exaggerate their personal profiles by describing themselves as intelligent with higher education. Hall et al. (2010) confirm this finding and argue that male daters who are less educated tend to use deceptive self-presentation in their online profiles more often than female daters. Therefore, it has been found that finding a perfect profile through ODSs can be quite challenging, since many daters present themselves as a perfect match rather than accurately representing who they are (Hall et al., 2010; Lucid, 2009).

In a study that set out to determine deception in ODS contexts, Best and Delmege (2012) found that some online daters who responded to their survey reported that although they were honest by describing themselves accurately and specifying physical attributes and personality traits of their ideal romantic partner, they felt that they were more likely to see themselves as unsuccessful to find a preferred partner than others.

Also, other researchers have attempted to explain deceptive self-presentation in ODS environments. Hall et al. (2010) point out that the common deception in ODSs is to exaggerate personal backgrounds. Ellison et al. (2012) suggest that in comparison with traditional dating, it is much easier to use deceptive self-presentation in online dating due to the lack of verbal cues. Finally, the rationale of deception in ODS environments is that

online daters desire to attract others and finding a perfect match for various purposes, such as a long-term relationships, a marriage partner, and/or a casual encounter (Couch et al., 2012).

Other studies have considered that both genders use deception, for instance, male daters are more likely to use deceptive self-presentation, such as their marital, educational, and financial status, while female daters are more likely to lie about their weight, physical appearance, and age (DeAndrea et al., 2012; Schmitz et al., 2011). Male daters are also more likely to lie about their characteristics (Toma & Hancock, 2010), their relationships, such as seeking a partner for chatting, a sexual affair, a short-term relationship, or a long-term relationship (Schmitz et al., 2011). Bak (2010) echoes Toma and Hancock (2010) and Ellison et al.'s (2012) views and concludes that female daters manipulate their physical attractiveness, while for Schmitz et al., (2013) male daters are more likely to use deceptive self-presentation, such as their marital, educational, and financial status.

Overall, ODSs provide a large opportunity for interaction with a pool of potential romantic partners (Guadagno et al., 2012; Lucid, 2009). Therefore, it has been shown conclusively that self-presentation in ODS environments is a complex issue for online daters, since the personal online profile is measured as a part of online daters' personality (Fiore et al., 2008). As result, online daters often question the honesty of other daters' profiles, particularly items related to age, relationship status, and photos (Norcie et al., 2013). Finkel et al. (2012) found that self-presentation management is more challenging because of the type of information that online daters may or may not provide; for instance, ODS daters may not wish to describe instances of depression, sickness, and

loneliness in their profiles because the latter information may jeopardize potential relationships.

Peters and Valkenburg, (2007) have revealed that unattractive online daters with low self-esteem use more strategies for their self-presentation than other daters, which include deceptive representation of self. Toma and Hancock (2010) argue that unattractive daters, in particular female daters, often use various strategies during initial self-presentation, such as paying a considerable amount of money for attractive photographs.

Chapter Summary

For decades, ODSs have become increasingly popular around the world, and these sites have significantly changed the way people interact. One of the more significant findings to emerge from the literature review is that ODSs have become an important tool for finding a romantic partner due to their anonymity and the low cost of some ODSs. As a result, a lot of daters have turned to ODSs to seek a romantic partner for various purposes. However, in order to be a member of these sites and to be contacted by others, all online daters have to create a personal profile.

The majority of empirical studies emphasize that certain aspects of ODSs are salient for daters and indicate that ODSs create numerous risks and consequences, such as misrepresentation, self-disclosure, and deception, whereby daters have more control over their self-presentation while creating their profile. It has been found that the major issue is related to dishonesty amongst online daters.

The purpose of this chapter was to review literature related to ODSs and to address the two important questions: “why”—the motivations for using ODSs—and

“how”—the strategies of self-presentation in ODS environments. Throughout this chapter, I have presented an overview of ODSs along with three important aspects of these sites, such as self-presentation, self-disclosure, and deception. The chapter also highlighted a number of issues related to the use of ODSs. Chapter 3 presents the methodology used in this study.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the study's methodology. It outlines the research design and instrumentation, including pilot-testing via questionnaire, and site and participant selection. The chapter also highlights data collection and analysis procedures, the steps taken to establish validity and credibility, as well as ethical considerations. The chapter concludes with a brief summary.

Research Design

The study's research methodology encompassed a mixed-method design with triangulation involving both quantitative and qualitative components discussed in the literature (e.g., Braun & Clarke, 2006; Creswell, 2003, 2008, 2009; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). According to Creswell (2003), a mixed-method approach is helpful because quantitative data describe the population or phenomenon being studied, while qualitative data provide a more comprehensive understanding of an issue or situation. Therefore, I deemed the mixed-method approach to be most suitable for the current study because it not only addressed the research questions—why do postsecondary students become involved in ODSs, and how do they present themselves on such sites—but also facilitated simultaneous data collection from both quantitative and qualitative perspectives (Creswell, 2008). Towards this end, the study employed a screening questionnaire and interviews for data collection and analysis (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007).

Instrumentation

As noted above, the study used a mixed-methods design that incorporated both quantitative and qualitative data. The instruments included a screening questionnaire and

interviews. The following section provides a description of these instruments and the process undertaken to develop them.

Screening questionnaire. The screening questionnaire or survey had two purposes: (a) to gather data corresponding to participants (full-time and part-time postsecondary students in an education program) attitudes, behaviours, views and knowledge of, and experiences with ODSs, and (b) to screen applicants who would be useful participants in the study's in-depth interviews. Initially, I thought to distribute the questionnaire in class; however, due to time constraints, storage concerns, and the need for anonymity, I decided to administer the survey online. This method was appropriate since participants could then complete the survey at a time that was convenient for them and in a location that ensured privacy, neither of which would have occurred if the survey had been completed during class time.

The screening questionnaire was designed to make the most efficient use of a survey method for data collection. The survey instrument included closed-ended (yes or no) responses, as well as five-item Likert-scale responses (e.g., 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree), which allowed participants to complete the questionnaire as accurately as possible while still allowing me to gauge respondents' attitudes in relation to key findings of previous studies corresponding to ODS usage. The instrument was divided into 10 sections described below (see Appendix A for the full questionnaire).

Section 1. Section 1 included 10 questions, four of which asked participants to provide demographic data such as gender, age, and marital status as well as academic status (i.e., part-time or full-time students). Three other questions asked respondents for general information through Yes or No responses; for example, "Have you explored an

ODS, had or have you had an ODS account?” The last three questions in section 1 offered multiple-choice responses; for example, “Which of the following accounts do you have or have you used in the past.” For the latter question, the names of 10 current ODSs were provided and participants were asked to indicate next to each site *1 = never used*, *2 = used in the past*, or *3 = use currently*, as applicable.

Sections 2 and 3. These sections corresponded to frequency of usage of and visit to ODSs. The names of 10 current ODSs were provided, including an option of “other” as an open-ended question that allowed participants to identify other ODSs. The questions in sections 2 and 3 provided multiple-choice responses for which respondents chose one or more options; for example, “What is the frequency of your visit to the following sites?” (*1 = never* to *5=2-3x per day*).

Sections 4 to 9. Each of these sections contained six sub-questions related to participants’ motivation to use ODSs and their cyber-management in ODS environments corresponding to self-presentation, self-disclosure, deception, and overall online dating experiences. Questions in these sections used a Likert-type scale; for example, the question/statement “Motivations to use/visit online dating sites” provided six examples of motivations (e.g., “seeking a romantic partner for the purpose of a long-term relationship”), and participants were asked to indicate their agreement using a 5-point scale (e.g., *1 = not important* to *5 = very important*).

Section 10. Section 10 included nine closed-ended questions with Yes or No responses, and also provided the opportunity for feedback and comments; for example: “Are you aware of the impact of disclosing personal information on ODSs?”

Interview Protocol

As a researcher, I wanted to gain more in-depth knowledge about ODSs by understanding other users' experiences with ODSs. I also sought to learn more about online daters by investigating real-life interactions rather than by merely gathering data that stemmed from existing research studies. The interviews thus allowed me to gather data from participants' experiences, my analysis of which helped to answer the study's research questions (Creswell, 2008).

I chose a semi-structured interview format because it provides greater flexibility in the discussion between the participants and the researcher (Creswell, 2008). Face-to-face interviews also foster an environment that optimizes the participants' comfort and privacy, thus encouraging them to speak freely and without limitation (Creswell, 2008). Furthermore, consistent with Creswell (2009), the open-ended questions not only allow respondents to express their beliefs, perceptions, experiences, and judgments in their own ways, but also allow them to decide which target questions they wish to respond to based on their knowledge and/or experiences. I conducted two face-to-face interviews with two postsecondary students in a private location in order to obtain richer information and to better understand the mechanisms of ODSs. Interview questions included the following: "Please tell me about good or bad experiences you had while you used an ODS." (See Appendix B for the detailed interview questionnaire). It is important to note that prior to administering the screening questionnaire to a random sample of postsecondary students and establishing the interview protocol used during in-depth interviews, the instruments were the subject of a pilot study as described below.

Screening Questionnaire Pilot-Testing

As Creswell (2009) notes, pilot-testing a questionnaire allows the researcher to evaluate and modify the instrument based on feedback from participants who completed the initial (i.e., pilot) questionnaire. The following procedures were used to pilot-test the instrument.

First pilot-test. To refine the wording of questions, and to make sure the structured questionnaire was clear and concise, the survey was pre-tested with individuals in the community (n=15) who did not form part of the final study, seven of whom (n=7) returned the questionnaire.

There are a few reasons why some of the original 15 volunteers did not respond to the questionnaire. First, my direct personal relationship with the majority of these individuals may have affected their comfort levels in answering the survey due to confidentiality concerns. Second, a few volunteers reported that they did not have access to the Internet and they were unfamiliar with ODSs and their services. Third, two individuals mentioned that they were married and, therefore, did not use ODSs. Lastly, because my study focuses on postsecondary students, a few of the potential respondents felt they were not suitable for the current study.

Second pilot-test. Prior to distributing the electronic survey, I met with a professor in my institution's Faculty of Education who proposed that I set up my survey on FluidSurveys—an Ottawa-based online survey service that complies with Canadian privacy laws and regulations. The procedure of setting up the electronic survey created a discussion that led to certain modifications, such as providing sufficient space for participants to express their comments and suggestions, as well as choosing a reasonable

format (e.g., colour and design). Lastly, we established convenient survey parameters in order to be anonymous.

Once the initial electronic survey was constructed, the professor and I conducted a small pilot study to test the survey instrument in order to identify any possible problems with its usability or accessibility. The professor tested the electronic survey first and then I tested it a second time. Following this, it was subsequently administered to my supervisor, and one other professor in the Faculty of Education.

The volunteers, my supervisor, and the professor for the pilot study received an email that provided a brief introduction to using the online survey through FluidSurveys. I received their feedback and they confirmed that the pilot survey was clear and usable. It was also found that the questionnaire in the pilot survey took an average of 15 minutes to complete, which was in keeping with the anticipated goal that the original questionnaire would take about 15-20 minutes to complete.

Interview Pilot-Testing

Pilot-testing for the interview was done with participants from one of the colleges and the results allowed for the revision of the interview protocol to enhance its clarity and comprehensibility. Creswell (2003) states that an effective interview protocol includes clear statements, accurate questions, and sufficient time for comments and discussion during the interview. Specifically, I decided to include a few open-ended questions during the interviews to encourage expressive answers from participants based on their knowledge, experiences, and points of view in regards to ODSs.

After I obtained clearance from the university's Research Ethics Board (REB, File #13-029), all essential information was given to potential participants including written

statements that their participation in the survey and interviews was entirely voluntary. They were made aware they could choose to withdraw from the study at any time, without any negative consequences.

Site and Participant Selection

The target population and site of the current study was from a public university in Southern Ontario, where full-time and part-time postsecondary students were enrolled in various programs (the sample for this study was limited to postsecondary students in an education program). The university site was appropriate to the research study since the purpose of the current study was to investigate why do postsecondary students become involved in ODSs, and how do postsecondary students present themselves on ODSs?

Participant Selection—Survey

Creswell (2008) states that random sampling is the best way to obtain a large pool of participants, and it can be used to ensure that each participant in the pool has an equal chance of being selected. Similar to the pilot-testing process, potential participants were contacted via email. The email included an invitation letter that presented a general introduction to the research topic along with the study's goal and the motives for conducting the survey and interviews. The email also provided comprehensive instructions for completing the online screening survey.

The objective of the invitation letter was to find students who were interested in participating in my research study involving ODSs, as well as to seek their agreement to participate in in-depth face-to-face interviews. Furthermore, along with the invitation letter, a consent form that contained a brief overview of the study's purpose and a

statement of the REB approval was sent through a mass email to students using the university's email system.

The online screening survey was administered to more than 600 postsecondary students, and a total of 20 participants (three males and 17 females) responded to the survey. The participants' ages ranged from 20–25 to 41+ years old. Half of the participants were full-time students and half were part-time students.

Participant Selection—Interview

The initial invitation letter also invited participants to take part in the face-to-face interviews. Although the study encompassed survey and interview components, potential participants were allowed to choose to participate in Phase 1 (survey) without necessarily agreeing to participate in Phase 2 (interview). Participants who wished to participate in the face-to-face interview were asked to provide a contact name and email address.

Even though I did not establish specific criteria to recruit participants from the chosen target population for the interviews, I had hoped to encounter potential participants who were active members of an ODS, had been previous members of an ODS, or had knowledge of and/or experiences with ODSs. My position was therefore aligned with Creswell's (2008) view that researchers purposely select individuals and sites in order to better understand the fundamental phenomenon. Fortunately, two participants, who had considerable knowledge and experiences with ODSs, showed interest and volunteered to participate in the face-to-face interviews.

I sought to establish appropriate times and locations for interviews before scheduling appointments with potential participants. Towards this end, I secured a private room in the university's Faculty of Education and a convenient time to use this space. I

then contacted the participants by email and negotiated the meeting place and time for each interview. One of the interviews was completed face-to-face, and the other was completed through Skype.

To ensure accuracy of participants' contributions, I requested interviewees' permission to record the interviews with a digital recording device. I also informed the participants that I would transcribe the interviews for further use in the data analysis procedure, and would perhaps use direct quotations from the interview transcripts for this thesis and/or subsequent publication. Prior to commencing each interview, I emphasized the confidentiality of all and any information disclosed during the interview. I also reiterated the research process to the participants, explained how the interview would be conducted, and reminded them that they had a right to end the interview or withdraw from the study at any time.

Data Collection Procedures

As noted earlier, scant research has been conducted on postsecondary students' involvement with ODSs. Therefore, using both quantitative and qualitative methods allow me to gain considerable knowledge not only about participants' experiences with ODSs, but also about the risks and consequences of ODS usage. Data collection involved a screening questionnaire in the form of an electronic survey, and in-depth face-to-face interviews with study participants, which all took place in December 2013.

Screening Questionnaire

The screening questionnaire was used primarily to gather quantitative data, though some questions were open-ended and used to capture qualitative data. The questionnaire allowed me to gather data from a specific group (i.e., postsecondary

students) for the purpose of describing, comparing, and explaining participants' knowledge, attitudes, and behaviours.

An important aspect of data collection was to ensure that the online screening questionnaire would be available to all potential participants. Participants could complete the questionnaire at a time that was convenient for them. Following the pilot-testing of the online questionnaire, potential participants were informed about the electronic survey and I provided participants with a link to access the questionnaire. Submission of the online survey was participants' consent for participation.

Interviews

In-depth interviews were conducted with two postsecondary students who had responded to the online survey. Two females, Jennifer (age 25) and Elyse (age 40)³ showed interest and volunteered to participate in Phase 2 of the study. Both of them were single and full-time graduate students. Jennifer was White and of British-Canadian ancestry and Elyse was Black and a Canadian.

Creswell (2003, 2008) notes that interviews provide the richest data when conducted face-to-face, since the interviewer and participant(s) can develop an informal discussion. I found that the participants felt comfortable during the interview process, and we were able to have an informal discussion about ODSs and their experiences. The interviews were constructed using open-ended questions that allowed the participants the opportunity to express their experiences and perspectives and to provide detailed answers regarding the target topic. I began the interviews by encouraging participants to express their points of view about ODSs from their own knowledge and experiences with ODSs,

³ Pseudonyms are used to protect participants' anonymity.

and to do so in their own words and in a free manner. I also asked participants if they had any additional questions about my research study. The major question that participants asked was the reason why I had chosen this topic. I realized that by providing them with an overview of both my professional and academic experiences in response to this question, I would not only gain participants' trust but also would create a friendly atmosphere that encouraged them to express their experiences.

During the semi-structured interviews, which consisted of two 1-hour interviews, I began by disclosing the purpose of the study and related other pertinent information to make sure that participants had sufficient knowledge about the research study. As noted earlier, the interviews were digitally recorded. In order to avoid any misunderstanding, I often summarized what participants said and asked them if they understood my question(s).

Data Analysis Procedures

I used the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software (version 20) for statistical analyses of quantitative data. I applied certain statistical methods to obtain particular results during analysis (e.g., "revised age groupings"). I used NVivo to code data obtained from interviews, as well as a few survey questions.

Due to the small sample size and unequal gender, I chose to use revised age groupings (RAG) for data analysis. To do so, I grouped participants into two categories based on their age—less than and equal to 25 ($<$ and $=$ 25) and greater than 25 ($>$ than 25)—and undertook the data analysis accordingly (see Table 1). The following section describes the procedures used to analyze both the quantitative and qualitative data.

Table 1

Summary of Revised Age Groupings

Age	Revised age groupings		Frequency
	< and = 25	> than 25	
20-25	10/100%	–	1
26-30	–	1/100%	1
31-40	–	5/100%	5
41+	–	4/100%	4
Total	10/50%	10/50%	11

Data Analysis—Survey

Twenty participants took part in the survey, representing three males and 17 females. Due to the small sample size and the difference between independent variables (genders), variables with low results were removed from further consideration. More specifically, I did not measure two independent variables involving gender (male and female). However, I took into consideration independent variables, including frequencies of demographic factors such as age, educational status, and marital status. I was also interested in finding out the relationships between independent variables (participants' age) and dependent variables, such as motivations.

Once the survey was completed, I first explored the questionnaire in word format via FluidSurveys. After the data were measured for analysis, I used SPSS to conduct statistical analysis. (The findings for each of these tests are presented in tables elsewhere in this document.)

I read through all survey responses in one sitting to develop a comprehensive understanding of overall findings. The results are presented in a sequence that corresponds to the structure of the questionnaire completed by participants. As mentioned above, data were analyzed using SPSS version 20. Section 1 tested for frequencies, cross-tabulation and chi-square testing; and included eleven subsections that focused on demographic and general information regarding the use of ODSs. Sections 2 to 9 contained multiple-choice and Likert-scale questions and involved cross-tabulation and chi-square testing. Section 10 contained nine closed-ended questions and involved cross-tabulation testing. I also used NVivo to code and analyze some of the survey's qualitative questions.

Data Analysis—Interviews

As noted earlier, data were collected through semi-structured interviews using a digital recorder for later transcription and analysis. Transcription generated approximately 20 pages of double-spaced text. Both digital recordings and interview transcripts were adapted using pseudonyms for participants to preserve confidentiality. Interview transcripts were analyzed using NVivo software (version 10). Findings were validated through member checking. The transcriptions were completed in December 2013. To ensure accuracy, I reviewed each transcript while listening to the digital recorder. In addition, I presented the transcripts to my supervisor for further verification and then sent them to participants for member checking.

As Creswell (2008) notes, the researcher's knowledge of a topic plays an important role in data analysis and can bring his or her personal justification and perspective to the interpretation of data. In other words, my academic experiences in relation to ODSs allowed for an in-depth analysis of the data and a better understanding of participants' statements.

In order to perform an in-depth analysis of the data based on participants' responses, I read the collected data to get a general and more global sense of the overarching themes and ideas (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Creswell, 2008). Creswell (2009) suggests that qualitative data can be analyzed simultaneously during data collection. Although I had only two interviews, I took Creswell's remark into consideration and began data analysis after the first interview. This approach provided the opportunity to further determine strengths and weaknesses of the interview protocol, review gaps of information, and create additional questions to fill such gaps, as needed. At the end of the

interviews, participants provided some appropriate suggestions and recommendations for the future research.

Coding Procedure

After transcribing the interviews, I read through the data to obtain an overview of the contents. I then highlighted specific words and phrases to gain a general idea of concepts and themes that merited further analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I followed the data analysis and coding procedure suggested by Creswell (2009). Specifically, I first organized and prepared the data for analysis by transcribing the digital recordings. I categorized all of the words, phrases, and patterns into themes. I then repeated the process in order to validate my initial findings and to identify further themes derived from the interview data. As Braun and Clarke (2006) argue, one of the benefits of thematic analysis is its flexibility; this method facilitates the identification, analysis, and reporting of patterns within data, and describes the data set in-depth detail.

I used NVivo 10 software to process the interview transcripts into thematic categories and subcategories, and to explore different possibilities of data analysis and interpretation. For instance, after the themes were coded, I was able to develop a conceptual framework for the purpose of facilitating the reporting of my findings. I undertook the initial and second coding procedure. For the third coding procedure, I submitted copies of the initial coded transcript to my supervisor and we subsequently found other themes and subthemes during our discussion.

Therefore, the coding was completed by highlighting in each transcript the important themes, ideas, and statements conveyed by participants (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Creswell, 2003, 2009). These themes were then further subdivided and categorized

according to significant statements and phrases, such as self-presentation, self-disclosure, deception, and consequences. I also looked for connections between codes (e.g., cause-effect relationships) both during and after the coding (Creswell, 2003).

Once again, I submitted the results of the coding procedure to my supervisor, who in turn confirmed the accuracy of the interview-transcript coding. I then stored a copy of the coded transcripts in a password-protected electronic file, and stored hard copies in my supervisor's secured, locked office.

Establishing Validity and Credibility

It was important to assess the reliability and validity of the study's instruments in order to correctly measure the resulting data. Creswell (2003) defines reliability as the extent to which a measurement instrument can be repeated, such as one used to measure demographic data. Creswell (2009) also suggests that validity will depend on evidence based on different groups, response procedures, and strategies, and that "Validity is the development of sound evidence to demonstrate that the test interpretation matches its proposed use" (p. 159).

In order to confirm the reliability of the interview protocol, this instrument was piloted with the help of professional personnel. Consistent with Creswell (2008), qualitative researchers validate findings and determine credibility through triangulation, which means using different data from different individuals, and/or member checking, in order to prove the trustworthiness or credibility of the interviews. I took the latter statement into consideration, and once transcripts were completed, I sent electronic copies of the transcribed interviews to participants for member checking and to determine

the accuracy and clarity of the findings before analysis. Data collected from the interviews were scrutinized and validated by my supervisor, as well.

Ethical Considerations

In regards to the ethical considerations, I first received approval clearance from the university's Research Ethics Board (REB, File #13-029). Creswell (2009) suggests that the researcher must take into consideration any ethical issue that may accrue during the research procedure. Therefore, my first and foremost consideration was to respect the study participants' rights, needs, and wishes.

The current study did not pose any significant risk because it only involved participants' knowledge and perceptions of ODSs. Interviewees were clearly aware of the topic and felt at ease while answering all questions. Further, participant anonymity was maintained during distribution of the survey (i.e., via electronic questionnaire) and participants' personal information was kept confidential.

However, because the research involved human participants, it was necessary to obtain REB approval. To begin the research procedure and obtain ethical approval, all pertinent information related to the study—including the invitation letter and consent forms for both phases (survey and interview)—was submitted in August 2013 to Brock University's REB. As noted earlier, I received REB approval in October 2013.

Chapter Summary

The main goal of this chapter was to present an overview of the methodology used for the current study. The chapter discussed the study's instrumentation as well as data collection and analysis procedures. The next chapter presents analyses and discusses the research findings from the survey questionnaires and interviews.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

The purpose of this thesis was to investigate ODSs usage amongst postsecondary students. More precisely, this research has addressed the following questions: (a) Why do postsecondary students become involved in ODS; and (b) How do postsecondary students present themselves on ODS?

Towards this end, I combined a mixed-methods research approach with a triangulation design to investigate my research questions. The study was conducted in two phases: Phase 1 consisted of an online screening survey while Phase 2 encompassed semi-structured in-depth interviews with two participants (see Chapter 3 for details of the research methodology and instrumentation). Chapter 4 is divided in two sections that examine the findings of the research data obtained both from the interviews and the survey. The chapter also presents a summary of the findings as they pertain to the research questions.

Survey Results and Discussion

This section has begun with an overview of the quantitative data collected from an online survey that represents participants' attitudes, views, opinions, and experiences with ODSs. I have first presented a summary of participants' demographic characteristics, such as gender, age, marital status, and students' academic status. Next, I have outlined findings from the interviews and analyze and discuss their results. Survey results were analyzed using SPSS version 20; frequency, cross-tabulation, and chi-square distribution were determined depending on the nature of the questions. The level of significance was set at 0.05. The findings for each of these tests are presented in both text and tabular form.

Section 1: General Information

In order to better understand the postsecondary students' background, the first part of Section 1 contained demographic information including participants' gender, age, marital status, and student academic status. A descriptive statistical analysis was used to identify frequencies and percentages all of three questions in this section.

Participant demographic characteristics. Question 1 focused on participants' gender. As stated in Chapter 3, an online survey was distributed to over 600 postsecondary students; however, only 20 students responded to the survey (n=20). As shown in Table 2, the 20 participants comprised three males and 17 females, representing 15% and 85% of respondents, respectively. A possible explanation for this may be that not all male postsecondary students were willing and/or comfortable to participate in the study due to the sensitive nature of the topic and/or questionnaire.

Table 3 illustrated the distribution of respondents according to their age. Participants were asked to indicate the age category appropriate to them, and all participants responded to the question (n=20). The participants' ages ranged from 20-25 to 41+ years old. The largest percentage (10%) was between 20-25 years old, and the lowest percentage (1%) was 26-30 years old. Again, it is possible that postsecondary students aged 20-25 were more flexible and/or comfortable answering the survey than those in the 26-30 years of age group.

The next question asked participants to indicate if they were full-time or part-time postsecondary students. The frequency of responses indicated that a total of 20 participants responded to this question. From the statistical analysis, it was apparent that half (50%) of participants were full-time students, and half (50%) of participants were

Table 2

Distribution of Respondents—Gender (N=20)

Gender	Frequency	Percent (%)
Male	3	15.0
Female	17	85.0

Table 3

Distribution of Respondents—Age (N=20)

Age	Frequency	Percent (%)
20-25	10	50.0
26-30	1	5.0
31-40	5	25.0
41+	4	20.0

part-time students enrolled in the education program (see Table 4).

The final question in the demographic section of the survey asked participants about their marital status. As shown in Table 5, 20 participants responded to this question; 13 participants (65%) reported being single, one (5%) being engaged, five (25%) being married, and one (5%) being separated.

To sum up, due to the small number of participants, this sample size was not fully representative of all postsecondary students in education programs. It would have been preferable if a larger number of postsecondary students would have responded, not only from the education program but also from different programs in order to augment the current study's reliability and validity. Nonetheless, all responses provided by those who participated in the survey were taken into consideration.

ODS engagement. The second part of Section 1 contained six questions, of which three had “Yes” or “No answers,” two had multiple-choice responses, and one had a Likert-scale response. For each of these questions a cross-tabulation was employed, and an independent chi square was used. The resulting analyses are presented as follow.

Question 1. The first question in this section asked postsecondary students if they had explored ODSs. As shown in Table 6, 17 participants from both age groups responded to the question, 10 of whom have explored ODSs. It therefore can be said that more than half of the respondents have explored at least one ODS for different purposes, ranging from simple curiosity to finding a romantic partner through such sites.

Question 2. Seventeen participants also responded to the second question in this section. Results shown in Table 7 indicate that only seven participants in the two age groups had an ODS account, in comparison to 10 participants who did not have an account. It can be

Table 4

Student Participants' Academic Status (N=20)

Academic status	Frequency	Percent (%)
Full-time student	10	50.0
Part-time student	10	50.0

Table 5

Participants' Marital Status (N=20)

Marital status	Frequency	Percent (%)
Single	13	65.0
Engaged	1	5.0
Married	5	25.0
Separated	1	5.0

Table 6

Have You Ever Explored Online Dating Sites?

		RAG		F
		< and = 25	> than 25	
Question/responses		Percent (%)		
Have you ever explored online dating sites?	1	40.0	60.0	10
	2	57.0	43.0	7

Note. 1 = Yes; 2 = No; F= Frequency; RAG = Revised Age Groupings.

Table 7

Did You Ever Have an Online Dating Account?

Question/responses	RAG			F
			Percent (%)	
	< and = 25	> than 25		
Did you ever have an online dating account?	1	29.0	71.0	7
	2	60.0	40.0	10

Note. 1 = Yes; 2 = No; F= Frequency; RAG = Revised Age Groupings.

concluded that fewer than half of respondents have used ODSs for the purpose of finding a friendship and/or seeking a romantic partner through these sites rather than through traditional methods.

Question 3. The third question asked participants whether or not they currently have an ODS. The result of this cross-tabulation count demonstrates that 17 participants responded to the question. Two of the 17 respondents reported that they currently have an ODS account, however, it is not clear if these participants are active members of a paid or an unpaid ODS (see Table 8).

Finally, in order to determine if there is a statistically significant difference between the two age groups and the three questions noted above, an independent chi square was used. The significant differences and/or difference can be viewed in Table 9, which showed that Q.1 χ^2 ($P=.467$) and Q.2 χ^2 ($P=.467$) are above $p \geq .05$. The results for these questions can be interpreted as having no statistically significant difference between the two age groups. It is possible that participants had an ODS and they found a romantic partner through these sites or they were not interested in seeking a romantic partner through ODSs. However, the results of chi square analysis of the third question indicates there is a statistically significant difference between the two age groups, since Q.3 χ^2 ($P=.002$) is below $p=.05$. This might indicate that the participants who responded to this questions are still using an ODS.

The results of the survey conducted by Madelen and Lenhart (2006) indicated that online daters between 18-29 years of age used at least one of the ODSs for the purpose of attracting a romantic partner. Similarly, Kim et al. (2009) explored the age of online daters and found that online daters between the ages of 19-48 used ODSs. It seems from

Table 8

Do You Currently Have an Online Dating Account?

		RAG		F
		< and = 25	> than 25	
Question/responses		Percent (%)		
Have you currently have an online dating account?	1	50.0	50.0	2
	2	47.0	53.0	15

Note. 1 = Yes; 2 = No; F= Frequency; RAG = Revised Age Groupings.

Table 9

Independent Chi-Square Test for Questions 1–3

	RAG	Q1	Q2	Q3
Chi-Square	.000 ^a	.529 ^b	.529 ^b	9.941 ^b
Df	1	1	1	1
Asymp. Sig.	1.000	.467	.467	.002

Note. RAG = Revised Age Groupings; df = degrees of freedom/ number of categories; Asymp. Sig. = p value.

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 10.0.

b. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 8.5.

Q1 χ^2 ($P=>.467$) and Q2 χ^2 ($P=>.467$) are above of $P=>.05$. The result can be interpreted as no statistically significant difference between the two age groups and these questions. Q3 χ^2 ($P=<.002$) is below than the $P=<.05$, which means there is a statistically significant difference between two age groups and this question.

these statements that since 2006 the age of online daters has expanded from 19 to 48 years of age. More specifically, ODSs have attracted a greater number of individuals older than 29 years of age (Madelen & Lenhart, 2006). My findings also suggest that participants ages 25 and older were quite active in ODSs, since a majority of them mentioned that they have explored and/or used an ODS. It is possible that they have used and/or explored such sites for curiosity.

Question 4. In the previous questions, I sought to determine participants' attitudes toward ODSs. With question 4, I wanted to find out if participants previously or currently had an account with one of six specific ODSs (see Table 10). Respondents answered using multiple-choice answers: 1 = never used; 2 = used in the past; 3 = currently use. A total of 16 participants responded to the question. Results show that all participants in the two age groups used one of the ODSs. PlentyofFish was used by the highest percentage of respondents less than 25 years of age (71%), and 29% of those 25 and older. The lowest percentage (10%) was reported for eHarmony and Lavalife. It is possible that participants used PlentyofFish due to its free services, which may reflect participants' financial status, and/or because the latter site provided them with a larger pool of potential daters than other sites. Finally, it should be noted that two participants in each the age groups reported that they currently use both the PlentyofFish and the Lavalife sites. An independent chi square test indicates that ChristianMingle ($p=.003$), eHarmony χ^2 ($p=.005$), Lavalife χ^2 ($p=.001$), and other sites χ^2 ($p=.013$) are less than $p<.05$, which means there is statistically significant difference between the two age groups' usage with these sites. It was obvious that the participants who responded to these questions have used these sites and do not use them anymore for personal reasons and/or

Table 10

Which of the Following Accounts Do You Have or Have You Used in the Past?

ODSs	Usage	RAG		F
		< and = 25	> than 25	
		Percent (%)		
Christian Mingle	1	50.0	50.0	2
	2	50.0	50.0	14
e-Harmony	1	–	100.0	2
	2	62.0	39.0	13
Lavalife	3	–	100.0	1
	2	62.0	39.0	13
PlentyofFish	1	29.0	71.0	7
	3	100.0	–	1
	2	63.0	38.0	8
Other	1	50.0	50.0	2
	2	64.0	36.0	11

Note. For Usage, 1 = used in the past; 2 = never used; 3 = currently use; RAG = Revised Age Groupings; F = Frequency.

Other ODSs: Asian Friend finder, Gaijin Pot Personals and LoveStruck (UK)

because they succeeded in finding the romantic partner they were looking for.

On the other hand, question 4, which was related to the PlentyofFish site χ^2 ($p=.068$), indicated that there was no statistically significant difference between the two age groups and this specific site. It seems to me that these participants have used this site in the past and still use this site since they have not yet found a romantic partner (see Table 11).

In comparison with unpaid and paid ODSs, it appeared that unpaid sites such as PlentyofFish were most often used amongst respondents, in contrast with paid ODSs such as Match.com. One study has revealed that more than one million female daters use PlentyofFish due to its free services (Frohlick & Migliardi, 2011). Other evidence has shown that more than 1.5 million people globally were members of PlentyofFish, and over 380,000 messages are exchanged per hour (Oliveira, 2010). Overall, this study's literature reviewed and survey indicated that unpaid ODSs have used more often than paid ODSs amongst online daters between 2011 and 2014.

Question 5. It was interested to identify from which sources postsecondary students found out about ODSs. Question 5 in Section 1 asked postsecondary students to indicate one or more of the following sources: “myself,” “friends,” “family,” “Internet,” “newspapers,” and “other.” The “other” option was an open-ended question that allowed respondents to specify other sources than those provided to them. The frequency test was used for analyzing data (see Table 12).

Sixteen participants responded to the question 5. The results indicated that all of the respondents had the opportunity to find out about ODSs from one of the above options mentioned. However, the highest percentage (30%) corresponded to “other,” and

Table 11

Independent Chi-Square Test for Question: Which of the Following Accounts Do You Have or Have You Used in the Past?

	RAG	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5
Chi-Square	.000 ^a	9.000 ^b	8.067 ^c	10.286 ^d	5.375 ^e	6.231 ^f
Df.	1	1	1	1	2	1
Asymp. Sig.	1.000	.003	.005	.001	.068	.013

Note. RAG = Revised Age Groupings; df = degrees of freedom/ number of categories; Asymp. Sig. = p value; Q1=ChristianMingle; Q2 =e-Harmony; Q3 = Lavalife; Q4 = Plentyof Fish; Q5 = other ODSs: Asian Friend finder, Gaijin Pot Personals and LoveStruck (UK)

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 10.0.

b. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 8.0.

c. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 7.5.

d. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 7.0.

e. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 5.3.

f. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 6.5.

Chi square test indicates that Q1 χ^2 ($p < .003$); Q2 χ^2 ($p < .005$); Q3 χ^2 ($p < .001$); Q5 χ^2 ($p < .013$) are less than $p < .05$, which means there is statistically significant difference between two age groups usage with these sites. Since Q4 χ^2 ($p = .068$) is above $P = .05$, there is no statistically significant difference between the two age groups and this specific site.

Table 12

From Which Source Did You First Find Out About Online Dating Sites?

Sources	Frequency	Percent (%)
Myself	1	5.0
Friends	3	15.0
Family	2	10.0
Internet	3	15.0
Newspapers	1	5.0
Other	6	30.0

Note. Other = TV and work peers.

more specifically to TV and participants' work colleagues. The possible explanation for this might be that the latter sources were more widespread than other sources.

Previous studies have revealed that ODS advertising has an impact on daters using these sites to find a romantic partner for the purpose of forming relationships. For instance, Gupta et al. (2012) state that some ODSs, such as eHarmony, advertise more widely through medias such as TV and newspapers rather than through their own sites. This view is supported by Finkel et al. (2012) who argue that commercial advertisements from ODSs have an impact on daters using these sites. For instance, PlentyofFish claims that its service allows daters to access up to "145 million monthly visitors" (Finkel et al., 2012, p. 4), while Match.com guarantees that daters will find a perfect match (Finkel et al., 2012).

Question 6. In contrast to the previous questions in Section 1 that looked at sources, question 6 sought to identify the locations where postsecondary students accessed ODSs and offered participants the following options: "home," "university," "library," "friend's house," "cell phone," "workplace," "coffee shop," and "other." These locations were chosen based on participants' access to the Internet. Similar to the previous question, the option "other" was an open-ended question that allowed participants to indicate other places than those provided to them.

As Table 13 shows, a total of 20 participants responded to this question. Each of these respondents reported that they had access to ODSs from one of the aforementioned places mentioned. Most respondents (30%) reported that they have access to ODSs from their home. It is obvious that accessing ODSs from home is most convenient for them, and this interpretation corresponds to Rege's (2009) view that since ODSs are accessible

Table 13

Where Do You Access Online Dating Sites?

Area of access	Frequency	Percent (%)
Home	6	30.0
University	1	5.0
Library	1	5.0
Friend's house	1	5.0
Cell-phone	2	10.0
Work place	1	5.0

24 hours per day and 7 days per week, online daters do not need to leave their home or workplace to find a romantic partner, and can scan others' profiles at their convenience.

The frequency count also showed that participants have access to ODSs from their cell phones. Smith and Duggan (2013) claim that accessing ODSs through cell phones is not an unusual experience for daters, and that approximately 66% of online daters had a date with a romantic partner they met through an ODS. Lastly, the current study's survey demonstrated that one participant accessed ODSs from a library, although there was no evidence to indicate if it was a public or university library. My findings ultimately suggested that further research should be undertaken to determine if postsecondary students access ODSs outside the home due to limited access at home.

Section 2: Frequency—Usage

For the question "Frequency—Usage of ODSs," a cross-tabulation was used to determine how frequently participants use ODSs. The following ODSs were provided as options: ChristianMingle, eHarmony, Lavalife, Match.com, OkCupid, PlentyofFish, Singlesent, True, Zoosk, and "other." As with the previous questions, the option "other" was an open-ended question that allowed participants to identify other ODSs than those provided to them. Four ODSs (OkCupid, Singlesent, True, and Zoosk) were removed from analysis since no participants selected those sites in their responses. Respondents answered questions on a 6-point Likert-type scale (*1 = never to 6 = 5 years or more*).

As shown in Table 14, results indicate that between the two age groups, the highest average of frequency usage of PlentyofFish was < 6 months (50%) and the lowest average of frequency usage of other ODSs was 10%. In regards to frequency usage of Match.com, the highest percentage (64%) of the < and = 25 age group and (36%) of the >

Table 14

Frequency Usage of ODSs

ODSs/answers		RAG		F
		< and = 25	> than 25	
		Percent (%)		
ChristianMingle	1	47.0	53.0	15
	2	100.0	—	1
E-harmony	1	62.0	39.0	13
	2	—	100.0	1
Lavalife	3	-	100.0	1
	1	57.0	43.0	14
	2	—	100.0	1
	4	—	100.0	1
Match.com	1	53.0	47.0	15
	2	—	100.0	1
PlentyofFish	1	63.0	38.0	8
	2	33.0	68.0	6
	3	100.0		1
	4	—	100.0	1
Other*	1	64.0	36.0	11
	2	100.0	—	1
	3	—	100.0	1

Note. RAG = Revised Age Groupings; 1 = never; 2 = <6 mths, 3 = 6mths to 1yr; 4 = 1yr to 3yrs
 Other ODSs: Asian Friend finder, Gaijin Pot Personals, and LoveStruck (UK).

than 25 age group indicated 6 months to 1 year, while the lowest percentage (10%) was reported by > than 25 years old.

An independent chi-square test was also used. Results indicate that ChristianMingle χ^2 ($p=.000$), eHarmony χ^2 ($p=.000$), Lavalife χ^2 ($p=.000$), Match.com χ^2 (.000), PlentyofFish χ^2 ($p=.023$), and other sites χ^2 ($p=.000$) are below $p<.05$. This represents statistically significant relationships between the two age groups and frequency usage of ODSs. It seems that two age groups frequently used these ODSs either as former or as regular members (see Table 15).

Section 3: Frequency—Visits

This section focused on the frequency of visits to ODSs. A total of 16 participants responded to this question. A crossable-tabulation analysis was performed to sum up how often postsecondary students visit ODSs. Similar to the previous question, the following ODSs were offered as choices: ChristianMingle, eHarmony, Lavalife, Match.com, OkCupid, PlentyofFish, Singlesent, True, Zoosk, and “other.” Once again, the “other” option was an open-ended question that allowed participants to identify other ODSs than those provided to them. Similar to the previous question, some of the ODS options (OkCupid, Singlesent, True, and Zoosk) were removed from analysis since none were selected. Respondents answered questions using a 6-point Likert-type scale ($1 = \text{never}$ to $6 = 2-3 \text{ x per day}$). Participants’ responses are shown in Table 16.

The results suggested that the majority of respondents visited at least one of the ODSs mentioned above. However, the highest percentage (50%) in two age groups reported that they have visited PlentyofFish 2-3x/year, and the lowest (10%) reported 2-3x /day. Other ODSs frequency reported with the lowest percentage (10%) by two age groups through 2-3x /year to 2-3x/ day.

Table 15

Independent Chi-Square Test for Question: Frequency Usage of ODSs

	RAG	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6
Chi-Square	.000 ^a	12.250 ^b	19.200 ^c	21.125 ^d	12.250 ^b	9.500 ^e	15.385 ^f
df	1	1	2	2	1	3	2
Asymp. Sig.	1.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.023	.000

Note. RAG = Revised Age Groupings; df = degrees of freedom/ number of categories; Asymp. Sig. = p value; Q1=ChristianMingle; Q2 =e-Harmony; Q3 = Lavalife; Q4 = match.com; Q5=Plentyof Fish; Q6 = ODSs: Asian Friend finder, Gaijin Pot Personals and LoveStruck (UK)

- a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 10.0.
- b. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 8.0.
- c. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 5.0.
- d. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 5.3.
- e. 4 cells (100.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 4.0.
- f. 3 cells (100.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 4.3.

Q1 χ^2 ($p < .000$); Q2 χ^2 ($p < .000$); Q3 χ^2 ($p < .000$); Q4 χ^2 ($p < .000$); Q5 χ^2 ($p < .023$); Q6 χ^2 ($p < .000$) are blow than $p < .05$. These strong represent statistically significant relationships between the two age groups and frequency usage of ODSs.

Table 16

Result of Frequency—Visits

ODSs/answers		RAG		F
		< and = 25	> than 25	
		Percent		
ChristianMingle	1	44.0	56.0	16
	2	100.0	—	1
e-Harmony	1	57.0	43.0	14
	2	—	100.0	1
	4	—	100.0	1
Lavalife	1	53.0	47.0	15
	3	—	100.0	1
PlentyofFish	1	50.0	50.0	10
	2	50.0	50.0	4
	3	-	100.0	1
	5	100.0	—	1
Other	1	62.0	39.0	13
	4	—	100.0	1

Note. 1 = never; 2 = 2-3/yr; 3 = 2-3/mth; 4 = 2-3/wk; 5 = 2-3/day; RAG = Revised Age Groupings; F = frequency; Other ODSs: Asian Friend finder, Gaijin Pot Personals, and LoveStruck (UK).

Chi square was calculated for each of options chosen by participants. The results indicated that there was a statistically significant difference between frequency visit of these sites and two age groups. The results are as follows: ChristianMingle χ^2 ($P=.000$), eHarmony χ^2 ($P=.000$), Lavalife χ^2 ($P=.000$), PlentyofFish χ^2 ($P=.004$), and other sites χ^2 ($P=.001$). These values were less than $p=.05$. It can therefore be assumed that although the majority of participants have chosen the option of “never” from the results, it seems that they have often visited these sites for different purposes (see Table 17).

Section 4: Motivation to Use/Visit ODSs

According to existing studies, millions of daters currently use ODSs. I sought to determine postsecondary students’ goals and motivations for using ODSs because of the increasing number of ODS users. The question in Section 4 contained six sub-questions answered by approximately 15 participants. Using a Likert-scale (where *1 = not at all important* to *5 = very important*), participants were asked to respond to each of the six possible motivations to use/visit ODSs (see Table 18).

In the two age groups, seven participants, 57% and 43%, respectively, indicated seeking a romantic partner for a long-term relationship as the motivation; 34% and 67%, respectively, indicated curiosity; and 40% and 57%, respectively, indicated accessibility to meet and mingle compared to traditional dating. Only one participant, in the > than 25 age group, indicated finding a marriage partner as an important motivation for using an ODS. Two participants reported that not having to leave home to search for a romantic partner was an important motivation.

The above data can be contrasted with findings from the literature that indicates ODS usage has become more widespread (Peter & Valkenburg 2007), and that online

Table 17

Independent Chi-Square Test for Question: Frequency—Visits

	RAG	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5
Chi-Square	.000 ^a	13.235 ^b	21.125 ^c	12.250 ^d	13.500 ^e	10.286 ^f
df	1	1	2	1	3	1
Asymp. Sig.	1.000	.000	.000	.000	.004	.001

Note. RAG = Revised Age Groupings; df = degrees of freedom/ number of categories; Asymp. Sig. = p value; Q1=ChristianMingle; Q2 =e-Harmony; Q3 = Lavalife; Q4 = Plentyof Fish; Q5 = other ODSs: Asian Friend finder, Gaijin Pot Personals and LoveStruck (UK)

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 10.0.

b. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 8.5.

c. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 5.3.

d. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 8.0.

e. 4 cells (100.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 4.0.

f. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 7.0.

Chi square test indicates that Q1 χ^2 ($P=<.000$); Q2 χ^2 ($P=<.000$); Q3 χ^2 ($P=<.000$); Q4 χ^2 ($P=<.004$); Q5 χ^2 ($P=<.001$) are less than $P=<.05$, which means there is a statistically significant difference between frequency visit of these sites and two age groups.

Table 18

Motivation to Use/Visit ODSs

Motivations/answers		RAG		F
		< and = 25	> than 25	
		Percent (%)		
1. Seeking a romantic partner for a long-term relationship.	1	—	100.0	1
	3	33.0	67.0	3
	4	50.0	50.0	4
	5	57.0	43.0	7
2. Seeking a casual partner.	1	33.0	67.0	3
	2	67.0	33.0	3
	3	33.0	67.0	3
	4	50.0	50.0	2
	5	67.0	33.0	3
3. Finding a marriage partner.	1	—	100.0	1
	2	50.0	50.0	2
	3	—	100.0	1
	4	43.0	57.0	7
	5	100.0	—	2
4. Curiosity, just want to explore dating sites.	1	67.0	33.0	3
	2	—	100.0	2
	3	67.0	33.0	3
	4	67.0	33.0	3
	5	33.0	67.0	3
5. Not having to leave 'home' to search for romance.	1	40.0	60.0	5
	2	50.0	50.0	2
	3	67.0	33.0	3
	4	—	100.0	2
	5	100.0	—	2
6. Increased accessibility to meet and mingle compared to traditional dating.	1	—	100.0	—
	3	100.0	—	2
	4	40.0	60.0	5
	5	43.0	57.0	7

Note. 1 = not important to 5 = very important; RAG =Revised Age Groupings; F = frequency.

daters' primary motivation for using ODSs was (a) to find a romantic partner (Kim et al., 2009), (b) to form a short- or long-term relationship (Schaupp & Schaupp, 2012), and (c) to find a marriage partner (Finkel et al., 2012).

Lastly, two participants indicated that seeking a casual partner was a motivation for using ODSs. A survey conducted by Gunter (2008) reported that 29% of more than 3,800 online daters reported that they had used at least one ODS, of whom 43% had a sexual relationship with a partner met online, and 9% found a marriage partner.

A chi-square test was computed in order to find out the relationship between the two age groups' motivations. Table 19 showed that the majority of the questions, such as Q1 χ^2 ($p=.172$), Q2 χ^2 ($p=.991$), Q4 χ^2 ($p=.991$), Q5 χ^2 ($p=.657$), and Q6 χ^2 ($p=.108$) are higher than ($p\leq .5$). Therefore, no statistically significant differences were found between two age groups and these motivations. In view of this fact, it is possible that participants' age had no impact on their motivations to use ODSs. Only question 3 χ^2 ($p=.046$) is less than $p\leq 0.5$ indicating that there is a relationship between participants in those age groups who responded to this question and their motivation for using an ODS. It was very clear from this observation that finding a potential spouse was one of the most significant motivations for participants who used an ODS.

It has been suggested that more female than male daters used ODSs, as they typically seek a long-term partner for the purpose of forming a family (Fiore et al., 2010; Hall et al., 2010), while male daters are mostly interested in occasional relationships (Alam et al., 2011). Smith and Duggan (2013) found that 23% of daters met a romantic partner through ODSs which resulted in a long-term relationship. Smith and Duggan

Table 19

Independent Chi-Square Test for Question: Motivation to Use/Visit ODSs

	RAG	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6
Chi-Square	.000 ^a	5.000 ^b	.286 ^c	9.692 ^d	.286 ^c	2.429 ^c	6.067 ^b
df	1	3	4	4	4	4	3
Asymp. Sig.	1.000	.172	.991	.046	.991	.657	.108

Note. RAG = Revised Age Groupings; df = degrees of freedom/ number of categories; Asymp. Sig. = p value.

- a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 10.0.
- b. 4 cells (100.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 3.8.
- c. 5 cells (100.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 2.8.
- d. 5 cells (100.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 2.6.

A Chi Square test showed that Q1 χ^2 ($p = >.172$); Q2 χ^2 ($p = >.991$); Q4 χ^2 ($p = >.991$); Q5 χ^2 ($p = >.657$); Q6 χ^2 ($p = >.108$) are higher than ($p = .05$). Therefore, no statistically significant differences were found between two age groups and these motivations. Only Q3 χ^2 ($p = <.046$) is less than $p < 0.5$ indicating that there is a relationship between those age groups who responded to this question and their motivation for using an ODS.

claim that daters' attitudes toward ODSs have become more positive, although numerous online daters reported negative experiences while using an ODS.

Section 5: Self-Presentation in ODS Environments

I was curious to discover postsecondary students' perception regarding self-presentation in ODS environments. This question included six statements and used a Likert scale to determine participants' agreement or disagreement with the statements. More than 11 participants responded to this question. A cross-tabulation test was used and the results are presented in Table 20.

Results suggested those who responded to this question completely agreed with all of the statements. Findings indicated that the highest percentage related to the statement 4, where respondents aged $< \text{and} = 25$ (67%) and $> \text{than } 25$ (33%) reported that their online profile allows them to present themselves in a favourable way. The results of a survey conducted by Gibbs et al. (2006) showed that 94% of daters reject the idea that their online profile contains false information. More research will need to be done to determine self-presentation's impact on participants' behaviour while creating an online profile.

Table 21 provided summary statistics for a chi-square test that demonstrated analysis did not confirm any significant relationship between two age groups and six statements. The results are as follows (statements are referred to as Q1 through Q6): Q1 χ^2 ($p=.736$), Q2 χ^2 ($p=.572$), Q3 χ^2 ($p=.158$), Q4 χ^2 ($p=.364$), Q5 χ^2 ($p=.705$), and Q6 χ^2 ($p=.261$), which mean these values are higher than ($p>.05$). This result may be explained by the fact that participants use ODSs without a profile. Another possible

Table 20

How I Present Myself Online Within Dating Sites

Questions/answers		RAG		F
		< and = 25	> than 25	
		Percent (%)		
1. I have developed a strategy for my self-presentation in online dating.	1	67.0	33.0	3
	2	50.0	50.0	4
	3	100.0	–	2
	4	33.0	67.0	3
	5	–	100.0	1
2. I think I am too concerned about my self-presentation online.	1	75.0	25.0	4
	2	50.0	50.0	4
	3	67.0	33.0	3
	5	–	100.0	1
3. My online self-presentation has an effect on my offline relationships.	1	67.0	33.0	6
	2	–	100.0	1
	3	67.0	33.0	3
	4	–	100.0	2
	5	100.0	–	1
4. My online personal profile allows me to present myself in a favorable way.	1	–	100.0	1
	2	60.0	40.0	5
	3	50.0	50.0	2
	5	67.0	33.0	3
5. ODS has become an innovative arena for self-presentation.	1	100.0	–	1
	2	50.0	50.0	2
	3	33.0	67.0	3
	4	50.0	50.0	4
	5	100.0	–	2
6. The perspective of others has an impact on my self-presentation.	1	100.0	–	2
	2	50.0	50.0	2
	3	67.0	33.0	6
	4	–	100.0	2

Note. 1 = completely disagree to 5 = completely agree; RAG = Revised Age Groupings; F = Frequency.

Table 21

Independent Chi-Square Test for Question: How I Present Myself Online Within Dating Sites

	RAG	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6
Chi-Square	.000 ^a	2.000 ^b	2.000 ^c	6.615 ^b	3.182 ^d	2.167 ^e	4.000 ^c
df	1	4	3	4	3	4	3
Asymp. Sig.	1.000	.736	.572	.158	.364	.705	.261

Note. RAG = Revised Age Groupings; df = degrees of freedom/ number of categories; Asymp. Sig. = p value.

- a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 10.0.
- b. 5 cells (100.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 2.6.
- c. 4 cells (100.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 3.0.
- d. 4 cells (100.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 2.8.
- e. 5 cells (100.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 2.4.

Chi Square test did not confirm any significant relationship between two age groups and six statements. The results are as follows: Q1 χ^2 ($p \Rightarrow .736$); Q2 χ^2 ($p \Rightarrow .572$); Q3 χ^2 ($p \Rightarrow .158$); Q4 χ^2 ($p \Rightarrow .364$), Q5 χ^2 ($p \Rightarrow .705$); Q6 χ^2 ($p \Rightarrow .261$), which mean these values are higher than ($p \Rightarrow .05$).

explanation is that all of the respondents who used ODSs were honest about their self-presentation in ODS environments. In contrast, Schmitz et al. (2013) suggested that ODSs often pressure daters to be attractive since self-presentation is becoming an important component of individuals' behaviour. Ellison et al. (2012) found that creating profiles is important for daters in ODS contexts since these profiles constitute an opening for future offline relationship dating.

Section 6: Use of Profile Photos in ODSs

To measure postsecondary students' attitudes regarding the use of photos in online profiles, I asked them to respond to six statements using a 5-point Likert scale (in which 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*). In short, I wanted to find out if photographs were considered an important tool in online profiles. I used cross-tabulation and an independent chi-square test to find out whether or not there is a difference between the two age groups' responses to the six statements. A total of 11 participants responded to the question. More than half of the respondents strongly agreed with all of statements provided. The results can be viewed in Table 22.

It is interesting to note that 67% of the < and=25 group and 33% of the > than 25 group reported that their online profile included a photo. It is possible that participants have included an attractive photo in their online profile. As Bak (2010) and Whitty (2011) note, attractive photos play an important role in daters' decision-making process. Posting attractive photos is considered to be an important tool for their self-presentation, while physical appearance and verbal communication skills are considered to be significant tools in traditional dating environments (Jiang et al., 2013).

Table 22

Use of Profile Photos in Online Dating Sites

Questions/answers		RAG		F
		< and = 25	> than 25	
		Percent (%)		
1. My online profile must include a photograph because that is the best way to meet potential partners.	1	50.0	50.0	2
	3	100.0	–	1
	4	43.0	57.0	7
	5	67.0	33.0	3
2. I have a recent photo in my online profile.	1	80.0	20.0	5
	3	50.0	50.0	2
	4	25.0	75.0	4
	5	5.00	50.0	2
3. I have used photo shop images for my profile.	1	56.0	44.0	9
	3	50.0	50.0	2
	5	100.0	–	1
4. I use an image from the past.	1	60.0	40.0	5
	3	50.0	50.0	4
	5	67.0	33.0	3
5. I have used photos of more attractive individuals for my profile.	1	55.0	46.0	11
	3	100.0	–	1
6. I do not believe it is necessary to include a photo.	1	60.0	40.0	5
	2	100.0	–	1
	3	25.0	75.0	4
	5	100.0	–	2

Note. 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree; RAG = Revised Age Groupings.

In addition, 67% of the $< \text{and} = 25$ group and 33% of the $> \text{than } 25$ group indicated that they have used older photos in their profiles, while 50% of both the $< \text{and} = 25$ group and the $> \text{than } 25$ group said they have used a recent photo in their profile. One participant used false photo, in other words, he/she manipulates self-presentation in their profile, and another participant did not find it necessary to include a photo in the profile. These results match those observed by Toma et al. (2008), who argued that one of the major misrepresentations in ODS environments is through photographs, which are more likely to be retouched or taken by professional photographers. Other investigators note that some daters are more likely to be older than they are portrayed in their photographs (Toma & Hancock, 2010; Whitty, 2011).

Data obtained through chi-square analysis showed that questions 3 and 5 resulted in the lowest value. More specifically, the result of Q3 χ^2 ($p < .009$) and Q5 χ^2 ($p < .004$) provided enough evidence to conclude that there is a statistically significant difference between two age groups and these questions. Although this result cannot be generalized, it seems that the inclusion of photos in profiles is important for those who use ODSs.

Other questions, such as Q1 χ^2 ($p = .094$), Q2 χ^2 ($p = .557$), Q4 χ^2 ($p = .779$), and Q6 χ^2 ($p = .343$) have a higher value than ($P > .05$), which means there is no significant difference between the two age groups' use of photos in their online profiles, which suggests that the inclusion of photos in profiles is not very important for some participants (see Table 23).

Section 7: Self-Disclosure

This section focuses on self-disclosure in ODS environments. A total of 12 participants responded to this question. Six statements were provided and participants

Table 23

Independent Chi-Square Test for Question: Use of Profile Photos in Online Dating Sites

	RAG	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6
Chi-Square	.000 ^a	6.385 ^b	2.077 ^b	9.500 ^c	.500 ^c	8.333 ^d	3.333 ^e
Df	1	3	3	2	2	1	3
Asymp. Sig.	1.000	.094	.557	.009	.779	.004	.343

Note. RAG = Revised Age Groupings; df = degrees of freedom/ number of categories; Asymp. Sig. = p value.

- a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 10.0.
- b. 4 cells (100.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 3.3.
- c. 3 cells (100.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 4.0.
- d. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 6.0.
- e. 4 cells (100.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 3.0.

Chi square test demonstrates that Q3 χ^2 ($p < .009$); Q5 χ^2 ($p < .004$) resulted in the lowest value, which means there is a statistically significant difference between two age groups and these questions. Other questions, such as Q1 χ^2 ($p > .094$); Q2 χ^2 ($p > .557$); Q4 χ^2 ($p > .779$); Q6 χ^2 ($p > .343$) have a higher value than ($P > .05$), which means there is no significant between two age groups and usage photos in their online profile.

rated these different statements using a 5-point Likert scale (in which 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*). I used cross-tabulation to establish the degree of correlation between two age groups and these six statements (see Table 24).

Approximately half of the respondents strongly agreed with all of these statements. Sixty-seven percent of the < and = 25 age group and 33% of the > than 25 age group reported that they were comfortable to disclose their emotions in their online profile. However, Fiore et al.'s (2010) in-depth analysis of misrepresentation on ODSs showed that excessive self-presentation and self-disclosure may create problems, such as greater feelings or instances of rejection.

Further, 67% of the < and = 25 age group and 33% of the > than 25 age group stated they are always aware of what they say about themselves in ODSs. In accordance with my results, a previous study by Mesch (2012) demonstrated that ODSs facilitate and encourage daters to self-disclose and divulge their personal information to others, since physical contact and verbal cues are absent.

Data obtained from the chi-square test that none of these questions were statistically significant; for instance: Q1 χ^2 ($p=.198$), Q2 χ^2 ($p=.736$), Q3 χ^2 ($p=.323$), Q4 χ^2 ($p=.881$), Q5 χ^2 ($p=.261$), and Q6 χ^2 ($p=.174$) (see Table 25). It is possible that all respondents are aware of the negative impact of self-disclosure in ODS environments, and they avoid disclosing their personal information through their online profile due to risks and consequences of fraud, for example.

My findings seem consistent with other research studies that found although self-disclosure takes place throughout the interaction and daters can verify the information of their romantic partner (Whitty 2011), there are still emotional concerns and possible

Table 24

Self-Disclosure

Questions/answers		RAG		F
		< and = 25	> than 25	
		Percent (%)		
1. I am sincere when I share my feelings with those I meet online.	2	50.0	50.0	2
	3	83.0	17.0	6
	4	–	100.0	3
	5	100.0	–	1
2. I am always conscious of what I am saying about myself in an online environment.	1	50.0	50.0	4
	2	100.0	–	2
	3	67.0	33.0	3
	4	–	100.0	3
	5	100.0	–	1
3. I am always honest in my self-disclosure while in online.	1	–	100.0	1
	2	67.0	33.0	3
	3	80.0	20.0	5
	4	–	100.0	2
	5	100.0	–	1
4. I am comfortable to disclose my emotions and I am interested in other’s emotions.	2	33.0	67.0	3
	3	50.0	50.0	4
	4	100.0	–	2
	5	67.0	33.0	3
5. I am open to reveal my personal information with others.	2	50.0	50.0	2
	3	50.0	50.0	6
	4	100.0	–	2
	5	50.0	50.0	2
6. Knowing what other daters think of me is important to me.	3	71.0	29.0	7
	4	33.0	67.0	3
	5	50.0	50.0	2
	5	100.0	–	2

Note. 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree; F = frequency; RAG = Revised Age Groupings.

Table 25

Independent Chi-Square Test for Question: Self-Disclosure

	RAG	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6
Chi-Square	.000 ^a	4.667 ^b	2.000 ^c	4.667 ^d	.667 ^b	4.000 ^b	3.500 ^e
df	1	3	4	4	3	3	2
Asymp. Sig.	1.000	.198	.736	.323	.881	.261	.174

Note. RAG = Revised Age Groupings; df = degrees of freedom/ number of categories; Asymp. Sig. = p value.

- a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 10.0.
- b. 4 cells (100.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 3.0.
- c. 5 cells (100.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 2.6.
- d. 5 cells (100.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 2.4.
- e. 3 cells (100.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 4.0.

Chi square test showed that none of these questions Q1 χ^2 ($p=>.198$); Q2 χ^2 ($p=>.736$); Q3 χ^2 ($p=>.323$), Q4 χ^2 ($p=>.881$); Q5 χ^2 ($p=>.261$); Q 6 χ^2 ($p=>.174$) were statistically significant, since p=value of these questions are higher than $p=.05$.

physical risks when meeting face-to-face with daters who are dangerous and untrustworthy (Couch et al., 2012). Other researchers support this statement, arguing that self-presentation, self-disclosure, and deception in ODSs are considered serious issues due to the underlying anonymity of ODS users (Schmitz et al., 2011; Toma & Hancock, 2010).

Section 8: Deception in Online Environments

Several studies suggested that deceptive self-presentation is one of the most common strategies amongst daters in ODS environments to attract a greater number of romantic partners (Rege, 2009; Schmitz et al., 2011; Toma & Hancock, 2010; Toma et al., 2008). Through this section's question, I sought to find out postsecondary students' perceptions in regards to other daters' deception on ODSs and whether or not the participants also used deceptive self-presentation in their profiles. Twelve participants responded to six statements using a 5-point Likert-scale (in which *1 = strongly disagree* to *5 = strongly agree*). I used cross-tabulation and chi-square analysis for the question (see Tables 26 & 27).

The findings from the cross-tabulation showed that only one participant in the $<$ and $=$ 25 age group strongly agreed that female daters lie about their age and one participant in the $>$ than 25 age group strongly agreed that male daters lie about their age. Two participants in the two age groups strongly agreed that male daters lie about their marital status. My findings are in agreement with Schmitz et al.'s (2013) findings which showed that female daters are more likely to misrepresent their physical attractiveness, whereas male daters are more likely to misrepresent their marital status, relationship goals, physical appearance, height, and age.

Table 26

Deception in Online Environment

Questions/answers		RAG		F
		< and = 25	> than 25	
		Percent (%)		
1. Female daters lie about their age.	1	–	100.0	1
	2	100.0	–	1
	3	80.0	20.0	5
	4	20.0	80.0	5
	5	100.0	–	1
2. Female daters lie about their marital status.	1	50.0	50.0	4
	2	100.0	–	3
	3	33.0	67.0	6
3. Male daters lie about their age.	2	100.0	–	1
	3	43.0	57.0	7
	4	100.0	–	3
	5	–	100.0	2
4. Male daters lie about their marital status.	2	100.0	–	2
	3	–	100.0	2
	4	57.0	43.0	7
	5	50.0	50.0	2
	5	67.0	33.0	3
5. I am willing to state little lies because I want others to contact me.	1	38.0	63.0	8
	2	100.0	–	1
	3	100.0	–	2
	4	–	100.0	1
6. I share big lies because I want others to contact me	1	46.0	55.0	11
	3	100.0	–	1

Note. 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree; F = frequency; RAG = Revised Age Groupings.

Table 27

Independent Chi-Square Test for Question: Deception in Online Environment

	RAG	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6
Chi-Square	.000 ^a	7.385 ^b	1.077 ^c	6.385 ^d	5.769 ^d	11.333 ^e	8.333 ^f
df	1	4	2	3	3	3	1
Asymp. Sig.	1.000	.117	.584	.094	.123	.010	.004

Note. RAG = Revised Age Groupings; df = degrees of freedom/ number of categories; Asymp. Sig. = p value.

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 10.0.

b. 5 cells (100.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 2.6.

c. 3 cells (100.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 4.3.

d. 4 cells (100.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 3.3.

e. 4 cells (100.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 3.0.

f. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 6.0.

Chi Square test showed that the Q5 χ^2 ($p < .010$); Q6 χ^2 ($p < .004$) are less than $p > .05$. That means there is a statistically significant difference between two age groups and these questions. However, the chi square test did not show any significant difference between respondents and the following questions: Q1 χ^2 ($p = .117$), Q2 χ^2 ($p = .584$); Q3 χ^2 ($p = .094$); Q4 χ^2 ($p = .123$) were higher than ($p > .05$).

Chi-square analysis showed that Q5 χ^2 ($p < .010$) and Q6 χ^2 ($p < .004$) are less than $p > .05$, which means there is a statistically significant difference between the two age groups and these questions. The degree of deception in online profiles should not come as a big surprise, since according to the literature the majority of online daters lie about their self-presentation. Therefore, it is probable that participants were deceptive through their self-presentation in order to find a romantic partner. However, it is important to note that because of the small sample size, these findings may not be generalized to all postsecondary students involved in ODSs and those who lie on their profile. The chi-square test did not show any significant difference between respondents; Q1 χ^2 ($p < .117$), Q2 χ^2 ($p < .584$), Q3 χ^2 ($p < .094$), and Q4 χ^2 ($p < .123$) were higher than $p > .05$. (See Table 27.)

Section 9: Online Dating Experiences

Postsecondary students were also asked to rate their experiences with ODSs based on six statements using a 5-point Likert-scale (in which 1 = *very dissatisfied* to 5 = *very satisfied*). I also used cross-tabulation and chi-square analysis.

As shown in Table 28, the results of the cross-tabulation test demonstrate that five participants in each age group (40% and 60%, respectively) reported that they found a romantic partner through ODSs. This finding supports Sprecher's (2009) definition of online dating that encompasses a variety of relationships, including finding a romantic partner for the purpose of establishing a relationship and/or marriage partner. Results of surveys conducted by Smith and Duggan (2013) also showed that nearly 66% of daters met a romantic partner through these sites, while approximately 23% of respondents reported that they had formed a long-term relationship with or married a partner whom

Table 28

Online Dating Experiences

Questions/answers		R A G		F
		< and = 25	> than 25	
		Percent (%)		
1. I no longer use this/these site (s) because I have found a partner.	1	50.0	50.0	4
	2	100.0	–	1
	3	67.0	33.0	3
	5	40.0	60.0	5
2. I continue to use the sites even though I have found a partner.	1	55.0	46.0	11
	3	50.0	50.0	2
3. I am unable to find a romantic partner online; this situation has a negative impact on my emotions.	1	43.0	57.0	7
	2	100.0	–	2
	3	50.0	50.0	2
	4	50.0	50.0	2
4. My online relationships frequently end after the first date.	1	60.0	40.0	5
	2	100.0	–	2
	3	50.0	50.0	4
	4	–	100.0	1
5. ODSs gave me the opportunity to encounter my actual partner.	1	71.0	29.0	7
	2	–	100.0	1
	3	67.0	33.0	3
6. The dater I met offline wasn't the dater I was corresponding with.	1	56.0	44.0	9
	3	67.0	33.0	3
	5	–	100.0	1

Note. 1 = very dissatisfied to 5 = very satisfied; RAG = Revised Age Groupings.

they had met through an ODS.

On the other hand, seven participants in two age groups (43% and 57%, respectively) reported that they were dissatisfied with their online experiences due to their relationships with a romantic partner met on an ODS, which often ended after the first date. Another interesting finding is that nine participants in the two age groups (56% and 44%, respectively) reported that a romantic partner with whom they had corresponded online was quite different when they met them offline.

It is possible that participants encountered a dishonest, deceptive romantic partner. This interpretation has been supported by some researchers who argue that although ODSs are popular tools for daters to find a romantic partner (Aretz et al., 2010); these sites provide potential risks and consequences (Kang & Hoffman, 2011). Additional studies should be conducted in order to find out how daters can trust others in ODSs to find a romantic partner (Guadagno et al., 2012).

The results of the chi-square analysis varied: Q1 χ^2 ($p=.442$), Q3 χ^2 ($p=.123$), Q4 χ^2 ($p=.279$), and Q5 χ^2 ($p=.094$) were above $p>.05$. Therefore, there is no statistically significant difference between two age groups and these questions. The results of these findings suggest that some participants had positive experiences with ODSs and others had bad experiences. However, the results of the chi-square test of questions Q2 χ^2 ($p=.013$) and Q6 χ^2 ($p=.018$) indicated that there is a statistically significant difference between two age groups and these questions. Although once again there were a small number of respondents to these questions, the results suggest that more research should be undertaken to find out the impact of these experiences on postsecondary students' lives (See Table 29).

Table 29

Independent Chi-Square Test for Question: Online Dating Experiences

	RAG	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6
Chi-Square	.000 ^a	2.692 ^b	6.231 ^c	5.769 ^b	5.077 ^d	6.385 ^b	8.000 ^e
df	1	3	1	3	4	3	2
Asymp. Sig.	1.000	.442	.013	.123	.279	.094	.018

Note. RAG = Revised Age Groupings; df = degrees of freedom/ number of categories; Asymp. Sig. = p value.

- a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 10.0.
- b. 4 cells (100.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 3.3.
- c. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 6.5.
- d. 5 cells (100.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 2.6.
- e. 3 cells (100.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 4.3.

The result of chi square varied Q1 χ^2 ($p=>.442$); Q3 χ^2 ($p=>.123$), Q4 χ^2 ($p=>.279$); Q5 χ^2 ($p=>.094$) are above ($p=>.05$), which means, there is no statistically significant difference between two age groups and these questions. However, follow questions Q2 χ^2 ($p=<.013$) and Q 6 χ^2 ($p=<.018$) indicated that there is a statistically significant difference between two age groups and these questions.

Section 10: Online Dating Awareness

While previous questions addressed participants' attitudes and behaviour relating to the usage of ODSs, the last question on the questionnaire examines the degree of participants' awareness, views, and opinions of the risks and consequences of the usage of ODSs. Therefore, this question looks at whether or not participants would consider using ODSs as the best place to look for a relationship. This question was designed as a "Yes" or "No" response along with open-ended questions/options in order to provide participants with ways to express their opinions. It is important to note that the result of this part was explained in the last section of findings interviews.

A cross-tabulation was compiled to find the frequency and percentage of participants' responses. A total of 13 participants responded to this question. A chi square was used to see relationships between the two age groups' responses and this set of survey questions (See Table 30).

The results of cross-tabulation showed that a few participants in two age groups (40% and 60%) have been in a relationship with a partner whom they met through an ODS. Thirteen respondents in two age groups (54% and 46%) were aware of the risks of dishonesty with online daters, and 12 respondents in two age groups (58% and 42%) reported that online daters cannot be trusted. The results can be interpreted as follows: although a few participants, in the two age groups, have found a partner through ODSs, they were also aware of the risks and consequences of the ODS usage, and were aware of the impact of disclosing their personal information on ODSs.

Couch et al. (2012) conducted in-depth interviews online with 29 participants to find out about risks and consequences of using ODSs. The result of these interviews

Table 30

Online Dating Awareness

Questions/answers		RAG		F
		< and = 25	> than 25	
		Percent (100%)		
1. Are you aware of the impact of disclosing personal information on ODSs?	1	100.0	–	1
	2	50.0	50.0	12
2. Are you aware of the risks of untrustworthy people online?	2	54.0	46.0	13
3. Do you have any concerns if someone at your university sees your online dating site profile?	1	60.0	40.0	5
	2	50.0	50.0	8
4. Does self-presentation in an ODS differ from traditional ways of meeting partners?	1	100.0	–	1
	2	50.0	50.0	12
5. Have you been in a relationship with someone that you met through an ODS sit?	1	63.0	38.0	8
	2	40.0	60.0	5
6. Would you consider contacting someone who had not attached a photo to his/her profile?	1	55.0	46.0	11
	2	50.0	50.0	2
7. Would you like to know what other online daters think about you?	1	50.0	50.0	10
	2	67.0	33.0	3
8. Would you say that most people on the dating sites can be trusted?	1	58.0	42.0	12
	2	–	100.0	1
9. Would you say that you always disclose only positive things about yourself in an online dating environment?	1	71.0	29.0	7
	2	33.0	67.0	6

Note. 1 = no, 2 = yes; RAG = Revised Age Groupings.

Table 31

Independent Chi-Square Test for Question: Online Dating Awareness

	RAG	Q1	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7	Q8	Q9
Chi-Square	.000a	9.308b	.692b	9.308b	.692b	6.231b	3.769b	9.308b	.077b
df	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Asymp. Sig.	1.000	.002	.405	.002	.405	.013	.052	.002	.782

Note. RAG = Revised Age Groupings; df = degrees of freedom/ number of categories; Asymp. Sig. = p value.

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 10.0.

b. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 6.5.

The result of chi square of the Q3 χ^2 ($p < .405$); Q5 χ^2 ($p < .405$); Q9 χ^2 ($p < .782$) demonstrate that there are no statically difference between the two age groups and these questions, since the p=value of these questions are higher than $p = .05$. However, Q1 χ^2 ($p < .002$); Q4 χ^2 ($p < .002$); Q6 ($p < .013$); Q7 ($p < .52$); Q8 ($p < .002$) are below then $p = .05$, which mean there are statically difference between the two age groups and these questions.

revealed that the major concern of online daters was the dishonesty of daters' self-presentation, such as fake photos, self-disclosure about physical appearance, age, height, and weight (Couch et al., 2012).

The result of the chi-square analysis of questions Q3 χ^2 ($p < .405$), Q5 χ^2 ($p < .405$), and Q9 χ^2 ($p < .782$) demonstrated that there are no statistical significance between the two age groups and these questions. What can be interpreted from this is that some participants are concerned about posting their personal information through ODSs, and others are not concerned, since they have actually secured relationships with a partner whom they met through ODSs.

Strong significant age grouping difference was found for the overall question. Results from the chi-square test indicate Q1 χ^2 ($p < .002$), Q4 χ^2 ($p = .002$), Q6 ($p = .013$), Q.7 ($p < .52$), and Q8 ($p = .002$), which means there are statistical differences between the two age groups and these questions (see Table 31).

Summary

Although my study examined a small number of postsecondary student ODS users, we can see that the majority of them had explored, visited, and used at least one ODS once in their lives. Their major motivation was to find a romantic partner for the purpose of a long-term relationship and/or a marriage partner. Lastly, the majority of participants were concerned about the risks and consequences of using ODSs.

Again, with a small sample size, caution must be considered, as the findings might not be generalized to all postsecondary students who have been involved in ODSs looking for a romantic partner in the hope of forming a family. Still, ODSs can be

considered one of the most effective ways for postsecondary students to find a romantic partner.

Interviews Results and Discussion

The previous section dealt with analysis and interpretation of data obtained from the questionnaire. This section presents analysis and interpretation of data gained from the interviews. In light of the responses from the participants, the results of these findings will be presented in two categories: (a) findings from the interviewees and (b) findings from the participants who responded to the last section of the survey.

Two full-time postsecondary students (Jennifer, age 25 and Elyse, age 40) were interested in participating in the in-depth interviews. Both participants reported that they have used ODSs to find a romantic partner with whom they could develop a relationship, such as a friendship and/or a serious relationship for the purpose of forming a family. In terms of current usage of ODSs, participants had used an ODS for durations ranging from 1 to 10 years.

Jennifer has been a member of an ODS for 1 year, and currently used a different ODS: "Currently I am enrolled in PlentyofFish, about a year." Elyse had been a member of Lavalife, but her account had been deactivated since 2008: "I do have a profile on Lavalife, but I chose to hide it for the time being."

In terms of the amount of time spent on the ODS, Jennifer maintained: "In the past a lot more than I ever should have." This has been shown to be significantly related to the need to use ODSs. She also said, "For now, on average, I would say an hour or two per week." Also, Elyse indicated that: "Initially, I was on every day, for like a half-hour."

As explained earlier, the data collected from both interviews and the last section of the survey were analyzed using NVivo. Throughout the coding several themes and subthemes emerged from the data collected, and the results of the major themes and subthemes are presented in detail below. All of the quotations provided by participants were incorporated in the exact manner in which I have transcribed them from the digital recording, without editing. Data analysis throughout transcripts using NVivo revealed relevant significant codes, which demonstrated that involvement with ODSs were certainly somewhat salient for participants.

Why Postsecondary Students Become Involved in ODSs

The significant codes are as follows: “feeling lonely”; “friendship”; “getting old”; “safety”; “protective”; “powerful”; “away from home”; “moved to new areas”; “access to other profile”; “anonymity”; “meet new people”; “number of people in ODS”; “living abroad”; “living in different country”; “positive experiences”; “romantic relationships”; and “long-term relationship.” I integrated these codes into the major theme of motivations and subthemes discussed below. The following are findings obtained from the interviews.

Initially, I was interested to get an in-depth understanding of participants’ motivations, perceptions, and experiences associated with the use of ODSs. I began by addressing the individual questions, which allowed for a better understanding of participants’ motivations for becoming involved with ODSs. Although there was a slight difference between Jennifer’s and Elyse’s motivations for using an ODS, two major common themes were found: (a) finding someone through ODSs for friendship and (b) seeking a romantic partner for the purpose of a long-term relationship.

Data from several sources have identified that the increased popularity of ODSs, in comparison with traditional ways, is not only due to the accessibility of ODSs (Sprecher, 2009), but also because these sites have attracted daters' attention through the special services that allow daters to attract a large pool of online daters (Finkel et al., 2012). These sites also allow daters to seek a potential partner for various purposes including finding a romantic partner for the purpose of establishing a relationship and/or marriage partner (Koeppel et al., 2013; Schmitz et al., 2011).

Friendship. A few studies have revealed that ODSs not only provide online daters a chance to find a romantic partner for a long-term relationship (Couch et al., 2012), but also create opportunities for daters to form satisfying friendships (Schmitz et al., 2011). In line with these statements, participants were asked about the reason for the first time they have decided to use an ODS.

After their explanation, I found that finding a romantic partner had two significant objectives for them. First, a life transition (e.g., they moved to a new area) for personal and professional reasons, and second forming a friendship with someone due to loneliness, because they do not have a social life outside of their professional field. Jennifer said: "The first time I signed up it was to find a romantic partner." She added: "When I went overseas it was to find friends, go to the park, and go to Museum." In view of this evidence, it is quite likely that Jennifer turned to online dating because it was more convenient for her than the traditional world to find someone for a friendship.

My data suggest that relationship development in that initial step of being involved with ODS was typically important for Jennifer: "I've met a few people from that website and gone out for coffee or we have become friends." Other motivation reported

by Jennifer was that ODSs are great ways to meet lots of people. She said: “I believe online dating is giving more chance of finding someone.” This is consistent with Couch et al.’s (2012) view that ODSs allow daters to search through their sites for a romantic partner that will perhaps match their own interests and/or the types of relationships they are looking for.

Jennifer also considers ODSs as a social interaction because of their convenience due to the accessibility and easy communication with others, in comparison with traditional dating. She also draws a distinction between online dating and traditional dating: “Online you can meet hundreds of new people,” more than in the traditional world, such as in the bar environment. Jennifer emphasizes her concern, related to dating with someone through social events: “and I think that’s still a good way of meeting people just like going to a bar.” Analytically, it was understandable that Jennifer would not like to meet someone in a bar or a social club. It is possible that she thought that she has more chance to find someone through ODSs.

In contrast, Sprecher’s (2009) online surveys of 3,215 ODS users have shown that only 3% of online daters reported that they met their romantic partner through online dating sites. Jennifer states that “we have access to so many different people.” However, it is important to recognize a negative outcome of the opportunity to attract different daters as mentioned by Jennifer. Some researchers argue that too much information, too many choices, and too many romantic partners may be a challenge (Best & Delmege, 2012), which means daters spend considerable time and money seeking a partner through these sites (Brooks, 2011).

Although Elyse was satisfied with her life, she first used ODSs because she moved to a new area. It appears that for her the opportunity to meet someone through ODSs for the purpose of friendship was not only important, but also easier than in the traditional world. She said that “The very first time, I just wanted to find somebody”. Also, for her, using ODSs for finding a romantic relationship was another significant event. Elyse went into more detail and explained: “So technology really changed a lot of aspects of life, but we all know that online shopping, it’s booming, everyone is doing it.”

Studies have shown that increased interest in using ODSs is due to advertisements of these sites through media; for instance, eHarmony claims that in 2005, a lot of marriages resulted from meeting someone through online dating sites, which stands at over 90 marriages (Sprecher, 2009). For this reason, more and more ODSs attract millions of daters to their sites (Bapna et al., 2012), as a result a lot of daters turn to ODSs to find their partners (Couch et al., 2012). Other evidence showed that ODSs are considered as a business for providing online daters with a way to find romantic partners (Brooks, 2011; Finkel et al., 2012).

Loneliness. Another motivation reported by Jennifer and Elyse corresponded to loneliness. It appears that they had experienced a period of loneliness, especially when they moved to a new area for personal and professional reasons. Thus, it was my understandings that Jennifer and Elyse thought ODSs were easier ways to connect with others than traditional methods. Through in-depth interviews with nearly 50 online daters, Lawson and Leck (2006) found that daters turned to ODSs for a variety of reasons including loneliness, divorce, and anxiety. That might confirm one of the purposes of ODSs is to support daters who feel lonely, and to increase their chances of finding a

friendship or forming a relationship through ODSs. This makes online daters with low self-esteem feel less vulnerable, especially if the interactions are for the purpose of a brief period, for example, in the case of Jennifer and Elyse.

Jennifer said: “You are lonely when you move countries or when you move provinces.” There is no doubt being alone had a strong effect on her decision, and she felt it was difficult to find people through traditional methods with whom she could maintain meaningful friendships. Jennifer also said: “Because now we’re open to so many different people.” Jennifer’s perspective for using ODSs was that she was confident that ODSs provide more opportunity to join and attract others than through traditional ways. Jennifer’s statement disagrees with Schmitz et al.’s (2010) findings, which showed that although ODSs increase their popularity among daters, due to a lack of trust and the risk of dishonesty, many daters are still anxious about looking for a romantic partner online through such sites.

Anonymity/low self-esteem. It has been argued that anonymity on ODSs allows daters to share personal information that they might not be able to reveal in traditional face-to-face meetings (McKenna, 2008). Therefore, I was interested in learning more about the participants’ opinions regarding this statement and the concept of anonymity. There were divergent opinions amongst interviewees about the advantages and disadvantages of anonymity on ODSs.

Jennifer mentioned: “I believe that people with low self-esteem don’t have any less of a chance because of the number of people that are online dating.” Jennifer’s statement suggests that daters with low self-esteem could have less anxiety about being rejected by other daters and they have an equal chance finding a romantic partner as

daters with high self-esteem. This point is aligned with Bapna et al.'s (2012) remark that online daters with low self-esteem can create their personal profiles in an anonymous manner and also have the opportunity to view other profiles without leaving a trace.

An online survey of 44 individuals conducted by Kang et al. (2013) showed that approximately 55% of respondents used anonymity for different online activities, including using fake profiles. It might be argued that while anonymity in ODS environments has an advantage for online daters with low self-esteem, it also creates one of the most obvious disadvantages of ODS environments: dishonesty (Gibb et al., 2011).

Jennifer points out another reason why she thinks daters with low self-esteem have more of a chance to find a romantic partner through ODSs than in the traditional words: "I believe that online dating is a good option for people with low self-esteem because it allows them access to people that they would not normally have and people can feel safe from being behind a computer screen." This statement might be considered as one of the advantages of ODSs associated with anonymity. It might be argued, however, that it is possible that online daters with low self-esteem spend more time on ODSs than other daters finding a romantic partner due to a lack of self-confidence.

Jennifer believes online daters with low self-esteem can share their personal feelings more openly and freely with others through online interaction. She specified that: "They don't have to handle rejection or acceptance face to face if they have low self-esteem." Another way of looking at this statement is that daters with low self-esteem can describe themselves truthfully without limitations, Jennifer mentioned: "Sending an email to others online because they're safe." In contrast, one of the impacts of the risk of

using ODSs is that online daters feel emotionally distressed and rejected by other daters, which has been noted by Couch and Liamputtong (2008).

The evidence presented in this section suggests that one of the advantages of ODSs is that daters perhaps can find a potential partner for a friendship relationship, in particular for daters who feel lonely. On the other hand, if the debate is to be moved forward, more research needs to be done about the phenomenon of anonymity in ODSs in order to gain a better understanding about online daters' experiences of being anonymous, and having an anonymous relationship with a romantic partner they meet through these sites.

Long-term relationship. Returning to the question posed at the beginning of each interview regarding participants' motivation to use ODSs, it is possible to state that Jennifer and Elyse tend to spend a great deal of their time scrutinizing a lot of profiles and sending text messages to some online daters, although they weren't sure that finding someone online would be more successful than through traditional methods. The first aspect to point out is that the accessibility and availability of ODSs was one of the factors that motivated them to continue seeking a romantic partner through these sites.

Jennifer said: "I've always said that having a family is very important to me and that I think about often." Elyse described the way in which ODSs increased contact with a variety of daters, and led her to be more open-minded to find a romantic partner. She continued: "I went on the online dating sites. ... I wanted to find someone long term." This confirms that online daters' attitudes toward ODSs are becoming more and more positive. A recent survey conducted by Smith and Duggan (2013) showed that nearly

46% of daters who use ODSs reported that finding a romantic partner through these sites is the foremost reason for them to use ODSs.

Jennifer mentioned another reason why she is still looking for a romantic partner. She said that: “Right now I have signed up because I am looking for a partner because I feel that I am getting old.” Jennifer’s statement echoes McWilliams and Barrett’s (2014) study that investigated aging adult users of ODSs who seek romantic partners. While it may be assumed that anyone in any age may seek a romantic partner through ODSs, Elyse reveals another point of view: “Being an older person and going on sites or going back to dating I was just clueless as to how things worked.”

From Elyse’s experiences with ODSs, in particular due to the number and types of responses she had received, she came to understand that the majority of female daters seek a romantic partner for the purpose of a long-term relationship, and a romantic partner who can protect them. She pointed out that “More often than not the woman’s going to take the taller guy because that it can mean he’s more protective and more powerful.” In contrast, McWilliams and Barrett (2014) draw our attention to identify characteristic of online daters and argue that older male daters seek younger female daters who can take care of them, while female daters also prefer a young partner with whom they can enjoy life and not just take care of them. However, Elyse’s argument becomes clear when Couch et al. (2012) maintain that in online dating environments, daters have the opportunity to describe in detail the type of romantic partner and the type of relationship that they seek and they are looking for in their profile.

Characteristics of romantic partner. In regards to participants' preference in a partner, I asked Jennifer to describe the ideal online profile of a potential partner. More specifically, what does a perfect profile means? She said that:

The first is the picture. The second is the education. The next one is employment. Do they want children, or do they have children. ... I guess location is after the picture. Because I don't want to start talking to someone who is in BC right? Do they have children? Because I am not quite sure about how I feel about dating someone who has children. Um, and then their interests and what they actually put into their profile.

Elyse also explains that her desired romantic partner should have some higher education: "I always want someone that has at least Bachelor degree. I think I would rather someone be local. You don't know who that person really is if they are so far away right?"

A number of studies, notably those conducted by Whitty (2008) and Morgan et al. (2010) can support Jennifer's statement; the researchers have shown that often daters refer to themselves as being attractive, professional, and socially active and hope to find a partner who also is attractive, professional, and likes social activities. This leads us to believe that online daters have the opportunity to select a romantic partner based on descriptions in their profiles. There is also some evidence to suggest that online daters are often interested in dating a romantic partner who has similar characteristics as they are indicated in their profile (Morgan et al., 2010).

Jennifer explains her emotional experience related to ODSs in detail: "I would be interested in a partner who did challenge me physically who would turn around and say

Let's go to the gym." However, she believes that she has to maintain her own beliefs and prejudice, especially when reflecting on her physical appearance, from other daters. She explained: "I think if I lost weight and I was the average size and I lost 50 pounds, I think I would get more responses than I do, and I have to admit that it is also something that I think about in terms of personal attraction. But because I believe I am a victim of this."

Based on Jennifer and Elyse's statements, I can conclude that when online daters are seeking a romantic partner, they are not only describing their personal ability and lifestyle, but also are portraying the type of a romantic partner in their profile. Therefore, I argue that the pressure of finding a romantic partner through a large pool of profiles may strongly encourage daters to be more deceptive when portraying themselves, in order to find a romantic partner and develop a long-term relationship and eventually forming a family. On the other hand, it appears that one of the most obvious consequences facing online daters who are overweight is that they are often ridiculed and prejudged. It would be interesting to compare experiences of online daters within the same issue.

Paid and unpaid ODSs. I wanted to find out if being a member of a paid or unpaid ODS has an impact on participants' motivations. Therefore, interviewees were asked how effective they found their memberships in paid or unpaid ODSs. They clarified that some ODSs provide free registration (e.g., Match.com) which allows daters to create their profiles for free, but daters will be charged for communicating with other daters. A few sites (e.g., PlentyofFish) provide free services to their daters either for registration or communication with other daters, and some ODSs (e.g., Lavalife) could be either paid or unpaid, depending on their policy.

In accordance with Jennifer and Elyse's explanation, I have found that they had considerable knowledge about paid and unpaid ODSs. The following are more justifications in regards of the difference between paid and unpaid ODSs provided by Jennifer and Elyse.

In term of paid ODSs, Elyse was a member of Lavalife and eHarmony: "I met on Lavalife, I went on eHarmony, as well, but on Lavalife, I find that we have the flexibility to go on each other's profiles." Jennifer also joined a paid site: "I signed up and paid, and I saw how much money they want." The statements of Jennifer and Elyse were supported by Coleman, (2009), who claims that a lot of online daters spent considerable time and money on ODSs. I have also heard stories and I have reviewed the existing studies that discuss about how ODSs make money from their users. I can assume that a couple's relationship can be destroyed when one of them is a member of an ODS and the bills of his/her membership and/or cell-phones (long distance communication) will be the subject of their discussion. This issue is demonstrated clearly by previous studies that indicate that although the majority of ODSs are not free of charge and some of these sites request a considerable fee (Brooks, 2011), there are a lot of daters looking for a romantic mate through these sites (Fiore et al., 2010).

Jennifer explicitly comments on paid sites: "If you pay for online dating sites you are obviously committed. You're actively looking for someone." This leads us to believe that the majority of ODSs have become a kind of shopping venue for finding a romantic partner for various reasons. She added: "It's expected that you put a lot more information into your sites, because it's not open to just anyone." A recent study by Smith and Duggan (2013) reported that although nowadays ODSs are considered an important tool

for finding a romantic partner, there are a few daters who use paid ODSs, such as Match.com and eHarmony.

Elyse comments echo Jennifer's remarks: "If you want to contact somebody you have to buy credits." This statement is challenged by Kang et al. (2013), who argue that that by using a credit card their anonymity is no longer assured; even daters use a pseudonym in their profile. Many daters do not have an idea of the possible intimidations that can happen online, as they often use their credit card information to shop online (Kang et al., 2013). On the other hand, Elyse thought that it would be unfair not to mention an important point: "I still see men out there with their profiles, looking for somebody." Elyse highlights the fact that: "Why are they active after five or six years?"

In terms of unpaid ODSs, Jennifer explained: "Because they're free they're open to anyone, all sorts of people from all walks of life and it's a different culture." A number of studies have found that some of the ODSs are innovating practical and inexpensive ways to select a romantic partner (Brook, 2011). Even more, the use of ODSs, such as eHarmony, Match.com, and PlentyofFish are growing in popularity amongst daters (Finkel et al., 2012), and more than one million female daters use PlentyofFish due to its free services (Frohlick & Migliardi, (2011). Elyse has other perceptions about unpaid ODSs; she argues that: "I found there were a lot of players on that website." This statement confirms that with the exceptional growth of the ODSs, there are some risks and consequences that are also associated with ODS use, such as dishonest daters.

Finally, in order to better understand the advantages and disadvantages of the paid and unpaid ODSs, and to distinguish between these sites and what participants knew, as well as what might be learned from their experiences, Elyse recognizes the issue of paid

ODSs. She points out: “I received so many expired profiles on eHarmony. ... If you don’t renew your membership they would flood you with about 20 or 30 profiles that were almost always expired.” It seems to Jennifer that having an account on unpaid and paid ODSs is not a big issue, since the hope of finding a romantic partner is more than the emotional risk of feeling rejected in an ODS environment. Jennifer explained that: When they’ve been on the site for a long time. And they haven’t found someone. They keep getting messages from maybe a specific kind of person.”

The findings from this discussion conclude that paid ODSs provide daters an opportunity to describe and discuss their perfect match while they are creating a profile, while unpaid ODSs are considered a freedom area where online daters can scrutinize a lot of profiles without restrictions.

How Postsecondary Students Present Themselves on ODSs

I wanted to find out how interviewees presented themselves in online dating environments and to gain more understanding about their perspective regarding other online daters’ self-presentation. In essence, the subject of self-presentation, such as physical attractiveness, photographs in online profiles, attractive and inappropriate photos (i.e., semi-nude) in online dating environments, stimulated discussions during the interviews.

Jennifer and Elyse believe that ODSs encourage daters to present themselves in a way that they perceive as desirable to others. Therefore, throughout the two interviews, interviewees used the following codes: “attractive appearance”; “less attractive”; “misrepresentation”; “attractive photos”; “inappropriate photos”; “attractive”; “a lot of guys do lie”; “embellish”; “attractive people”; “younger”; “physical appearance”;

“weight”; “age”; “overweight”; and “fake photos.” The next few sections will outline findings from this line of questioning.

Self-Presentation. In relation to self-presentation on their ODS profiles and how others self-present, Jennifer and Elyse believe that self-presentation is a serious issue in ODS environments. Ellison et al. (2006) argue that in contrast to the traditional world, the lack of nonverbal cues in online contexts has an impact on self-presentation management strategies amongst online daters. Jennifer claims: “I think it’s very true.”

Elyse maintains that ODSs provide an intimate environment in which online daters can have more control over their self-presentation in order to become a first choice. She further explains: “Because all women like tall men. I can say that pretty definitely. We have a choice A and B everything the same.” Jennifer supports Elyse’s statement when she says: “The people who are more attractive get more results.” Elyse explained in more detail: “Twins let’s say. One’s 5’5” and the other one’s 5’10”. Such statements as this are challenged by Ellison et al. (2006) who interviewed over 34 online daters in order to investigate self-presentation strategies in online environments. The researchers found online daters often intentionally lied about their characteristics in their online profile. Other investigations about deceptive self-presentation conducted by Schmitz et al. (2011) found that approximately 35% of female daters lied about their weight, 26% about their age, and 30% of participants reported that they lied about their profile picture. Male daters reported to lie 45% about their long-term relationships, 38% about their weight, and 36% about their marital status (Schmitz et al., 2011).

Jennifer describes self-presentation as: “To me self-presentation would be how you see yourself in your life, where you see yourself going and your expectations at the

time.” Along with Ellison et al. (2006), it appears that in contrast to the traditional world, online daters have the ability to control their self-presentation in online environments. But Jennifer seems to be honest about her self-presentation: “I have always tried very clearly to express myself as very professional. I make it very clear what my expectations are and what kind of a person I am.”

Physical appearance. I anticipated finding how physical appearance has an impact on Jennifer and Elyse’s self-presentation in ODSs context. While interviewees were asked to express their opinion about physical appearance, they suggest that ODSs encouraged an environment in which selecting a partner becomes challenging. Previous research has also claimed the majority of online daters; in particular, female daters lie about their physical appearance by including outdated photos in their profile (Whitty, 2008). Couch et al. (2012) found that ODSs allow daters to create a personal profile where they can post their personal interests, describe their physical attributes, and include demographic details such as age, gender, and location.

Jennifer strongly believes that physical appearance is important in ODSs contexts: “Because I believe the physical attraction has to be the first thing.” In other words, it is generally agreed that online daters with physical attractiveness have a better chance to find a romantic partner than those who are considered to be less attractive. Jennifer explains: “If you don’t have physical attraction then I don’t believe you have a basis for a relationship.” It seems that there is discrimination amongst online daters in ODS environments. One of the discriminations noted by Jennifer is as follows: “I am overweight which I can acknowledge is a negative against me when other people.”

Also, physical attractiveness is considered as a primary factor to attract a romantic partner in online dating contexts. Jennifer explained: “So if you were slightly unattractive then you will get nobody interested in you right?” Jennifer’s statement is supported by Schmitz et al. (2013) who used an online survey with 3,535 daters through a German dating site. The result of their investigation showed that female daters were more likely to misrepresent themselves about their physical attractiveness. As part of the interview process, I tried to talk about less attractive online daters. Elyse openly described what it is to be a less attractive: “No one wants someone over 40. They don’t even want someone over 30 to be honest.” Jennifer claims that: “just because I am overweight doesn’t mean I am not interested in being physically active...I have a bit of anxiety.”

Concluding this section, we can say that online daters often reorganized their own strategies to misrepresent themselves, which allowed them to present a positive image and characteristics, although they recognized these descriptions of self were not part of their current identify.

Misrepresentation. I really enjoyed my conversation with interviewees. When I asked them what types of self-presentation techniques they employed when they have created their online profiles, each of them were very honest when responding to this question. Elyse laughed and admitted that she had slightly misrepresented her age in her online profile. She stated that it was not for malevolent reasons, but rather as a way to attract a romantic partner. Elyse said: “Let’s be honest here. I shave a few years off my age. And I don’t want to be deceptive by shaving 6 or 7 because, after chatting with people a couple of times they put two and two together.” This statement is challenged by Hall et al. (2010), who conducted a survey with over 5,000 online daters, and the result

showed that male daters were more likely than female daters to misrepresent their age, marital status, financial status, and education, whereas females were more likely to misrepresent their weight. The result of this finding appeared that some online daters never indicated the reality of their background (e.g., marital status) in their profile.

Other plausible explanations of misrepresentation in ODSs environments would be Gibbs et al.'s (2011) investigation of misrepresentation in online dating environments. The researchers found that 86% of online daters misrepresented their physical appearance, while 49% did so about relationship goals, 46% about age, 45% about income, and 40% about marital status (Gibbs et al., 2010). Further, DeAndrea et al. (2012) conducted an examination about online misrepresentation, through three studies with 150 participants. The objective of this study was to measure online daters' weight and height before and after they create their online profile. The result of their investigation confirmed that female daters are more likely than male daters to misrepresent their weight, and male daters misrepresent their height and age.

Elyse continues to explain the reason for which she misrepresents herself in her online profile: "So I find that if I don't shave off a couple years it's very difficult." However she claims that: "My profile is 95% accurate. So I'm hoping that other people's profiles are at least 80% accurate." Elyse hopes cannot be realized since a study by Toma et al. (2008) showed that approximately 81% of respondents who completed their questionnaire in regards to online dating profiles misrepresented their height and weight. Jennifer states that: "Like on my profile, mine says I have a few extra pounds because I didn't feel comfortable putting BBW. So I put a few extra pounds and they can see in I think it's my full body." The issue of deceptive self-presentation has been much

discussed in earlier literature. Ellison et al. (2006) interviewed over 34 online daters in order to investigate self-presentation strategies in online environment. The researchers found online daters often intentionally lied about their characteristics in their online profile.

While different approaches to misrepresentation are discussed throughout the literature, fundamentally the same ideas about misrepresentation and its behaviours are described by Jennifer and Elyse. In keeping with them in the ODSs context, online daters present themselves in inappropriate ways by using various strategies when creating their profiles. Elyse recognizes the phenomenon as the most widely accepted in ODSs environment: “We’re always going to be attracted to someone who is better looking than the other person right. But you have to keep in mind that the men are also looking at you in that way as well.”

ODSs appear to provide a sense of opportunity for daters to present themselves as more attractive to other daters. It is argued that online daters’ decisions are often based on profiles, in particular photographs, which are quite opposed to the traditional world. Jennifer claims that: “I think if we didn’t have online dating, we wouldn’t be considering that. And I think a lot of people question that.”

Attractive photos. Hancock and Toma (2009) examined the accuracy of online daters’ photographs. The researchers state that a greater number of female than male daters misrepresent themselves in the photographs. Hancock and Toma also demonstrated that the majority of online daters were deceptive about their photographs, and most of them used pleasing photos and/or chose photos in which they appear younger. It appears

that a profile with photographs has better results than a profile that contains no photograph.

Jennifer Said: “I think a lot of people would do that with their pictures.” Elyse believes that a number of daters use fake profiles, and their pictures were often not accurate. She claims that online daters manipulate their appearance by posting attractive photos: “I look at other girls’ website photos and the way they pose and the photos that they choose to put up. ... So much makeup on their face and very high heeled shoes they look like they are at a party.” It appears that photographs have an impact on dating interests, and the majority of dating success was due to attractiveness of the photographs in profiles.

Jennifer shared the following story: “In his picture online he was very good looking, and I was like oh, ok. And then when we went to actually go meet, he looked much older and I was kind of like, I was very surprised.” In keeping with Jennifer’s statement, it is probable that certain online daters, even males, use self-presentation strategies, such as posting an attractive photograph, in order to increase their chance of finding a romantic partner in the first place, even though the truth may become apparent later in offline meeting. Elyse explained: “Because the attractive men always want someone at least 10 years younger than them.” In approaching this issue, one could say that photographs have a strong influence on online profiles, especially for female daters. Jennifer said: “They showed themselves when they were younger.” “I think a lot of people are prepared to tell little white lies.”

On the other hand, it was assumed that photographs have other significant effects on daters’ self-presentation, in which they are often judged in a different way. Jennifer’s

view is that: “I trust someone by their picture? No! Never! It might not even be their picture.” Elyse also mentioned that she “would be very hesitant to contact and/or to receive contact from someone who doesn’t have a profile photo.” Based on interviewees’ arguments, ODSs direct their daters to include photos in their profiles, in order to increase their chances of being viewed by other daters.

Inappropriate photos. The interviewees were asked about what motivates online daters to include inappropriate photo(s) in their profiles. Jennifer and Elyse claim that although the majority of online daters can post photos in their profiles, some of those daters present an image of themselves so exaggerated that they do not represent who they truly are. Elyse explained: “I see a lot of guys and a lot of girls put up photos of themselves holding up alcohol.” Jennifer also argues that: “There have been several times when men’s pictures have come up and it’s not of their face; it’s of their penis. There is an expectation for your pictures and your penis is not one of them.” Consistent with Jennifer and Elyse, the use of inaccurate photos in online profiles is considered as a critical self-presentation since the photos are the primary means of expression by online daters.

Self-Disclosure. Rosen et al. (2008) investigated the procedure of online dating in order to find out the similarities and differences between online and offline dating and how the emotional impact of them on online daters’ self-disclosure in online contexts. Rosen et al. conducted an online survey where (n=451) participants were online daters and (n=656) were traditional daters. The results demonstrated that for traditional daters, personal information such as education and individual characteristics are the most important factors in dating. In contrast, for online daters’ strong emotional words, such as

“wonderful,” “excited,” or “happy” provide a positive impression, in contrast to an email with less emotional words (Rosen et al., 2008).

Although the deception may seem simple and insignificant for certain daters, for Jennifer and Elyse deception is a serious problem, and may have a negative impact in offline dating relationships. One should, nevertheless, consider the issue of deception in ODS contexts from another angle, which means daters should be more careful when seeking a romantic partner through such sites. Jennifer appears to be more determined: “If someone is prepared to lie, then they are prepared to lie in person.”

In sum, one of the most significant findings to emerge from this section is that data obtained from the interviewees confirmed that the majority of online daters misrepresent themselves through their profile for a variety of reasons. One of the biggest misrepresentations is about physical appearance and fake photos in profiles. More specifically, some online daters use attractive and/or old photos in order to be chosen in the first place, while others are deceptive about their physical appearance with the purpose of attracting more romantic partners and/or due to their low self-esteem.

Impact of ODSs on Postsecondary Students’ Lives

It has been said that ODSs create a significant advantage for daters who are actively seeking a romantic partner. However, Schmitz et al. (2011) have highlighted numerous negative prejudices toward finding a romantic partner through these sites, especially in regards to its risks and disadvantages, such as rejection by other daters.

The result of the interviews with Jennifer and Elyse demonstrated some of the negative aspects of ODSs. One of the more consistent findings from the interviewees is that participants considered themselves as being vulnerable and as victims of ODSs.

Some of the codes that emerged during interviews included: “anger,” “anxiety,” “casual relationship,” “depression,” “discouragement,” “embarrass,” “harassment,” “insulted,” “rejection,” “low self-esteem,” “naïve,” “negative emotions,” “negative experiences,” “overweight,” “panic,” “rude email,” “sex sites,” “shame,” “tough time,” “weight issues,” “closing down account,” and “sign another account.”

Negative experiences. Jennifer reported her emotional difficulty during a period of time in which had a bad experience with an online dater. This negative experience had an impact on her academic and professional performance. She explained: “I would get this feeling of anxiousness, almost like panic attacks.” At that time, for Jennifer it was clear that meeting a romantic partner online is probably more unsafe than meeting people through traditional methods. She claims that: “It made me very anxious. And I was going through a very tough time. I was dealing with depression. And it just contributed to my symptoms with my anxiety.” This point is particularly relevant to the risks and consequences pertaining to the usage of ODSs. Jennifer explained that for a while she did not use ODSs due to her anxiety, and she was uncertain whether to continue seeking a romantic partner through ODSs. She explains in detail: “It took me a long time to be able to sign back on again or to become ok with trying online dating again. It took me quite a few years.” Jennifer also had experiences with online daters who were rude; thus, she was not sure whether she should pursue dating online or in the traditional way. She compared the risks between meeting someone through ODSs and the risk of encountering someone through traditional dating. She noted that “You don’t know the background of people you meet in a bar. I don’t know if he is a sex offender or he’s been in jail for drugs or any of that until he tells me. So I think you always have to be careful.” She adds: “Online dating

is a positive thing if used correctly. But it can be quite dangerous when it's abused." With respect to Jennifer's perception about traditional dating, it is preferable to consider whether ODSs make daters feel less or more lonely or if these sites create more vulnerabilities.

Trust. A common theme among a great number of daters who use ODSs for different reasons was that daters want to present themselves in the best possible way to attract a romantic partner (Schmitz et al., 2011). Given that, one important issue is the risk of developing trust with others online. Elyse said: "This guy emails and contacts me and said "would you like to have a casual encounter?" And I wrote back, I was so naïve, I said sure I'd like to meet for coffee." Elyse continues: "I was so embarrassed." "I was so insulted." Because she didn't know that "Casual encounters means having sex!" It would be interesting for more research to be undertaken to investigate whether ODSs increase risk behaviours that occur when daters are looking for a casual partner. Jennifer also told me about a bad experience she had with a dater: "I had experiences with the people who were rude. ... He contacted me through the website and sent me very inappropriate messages."

One of the factors that contribute to the difficulty of developing trust in ODS environments is the use of photographs in profiles. Jennifer states that: "Based on a profile I don't think you can trust anyone."

Negative emotions. Participants were asked to talk about negative emotions resulting from their use of ODSs. The following codes were used by Jennifer and Elyse when we discussed negative emotions resulting from their bad experiences with ODS: "anger," "anxiety," "depression," "discouragement," "overweight," "rejection," and

“tough time.” Consistent with Jennifer and Elyse, when the goal of online daters is unknown, the possibility of some significant negative impacts is very high. Schmitz et al. (2011) support this statement and suggest that although numerous daters use ODSs, many daters cannot find romantic partners.

Jennifer claims that finding a romantic partner through these sites wasn't easy for her and resulted in a long and difficult process. Jennifer explained: “I could send a nice personal email and ask them a lot about them and you just don't hear anything back. Like it can upset you and then you just have to shrug it off. ... I was thinking I'm never gonna find someone.” It was evident that this situation had an impact on her emotional well-being. She added: “I'm gonna be single forever. And this is so depressing. I often get discouraged by people who do message me, if that makes sense.”

Elyse also experienced a negative relationship when she used an ODS: “rejection of feeling not wanted. I think I am not your typically in such that. I actually get angry when these really disgusting online daters want to contact me.” She added: “I wrote in my profile explicitly what age group I am looking at and what I am looking for, but ...”. Although, there are many ways to find a romantic partner, such as through social events, ODS have become an important tool as these sites provide their services to daters to find a romantic partner (Guadagno et al., 2012).

Resolution. I asked Jennifer and Elyse whether they would have had a better chance to find friends and/or a romantic partner in more traditional ways than through online dating. Jennifer replied: “I don't think that it will severely impact me. I like to think that I'm a very strong woman. And if it takes me another 10 years to find someone then it takes me another 10 years to find someone.”

In contrast, Elyse has decided to close her account, since she didn't have enough contacts from romantic partners that she had interested or that interested her. She claims that: "It was a total waste of time, total waste of money." This confirms that she was discouraged by her experience with ODSs. She explained: "It was very frustrating to know that 90% of the profiles they sent to me were expired. I don't know. At this point I don't think I would go online dating."

In contrast, Jennifer is a very strong woman and she admits that: "I would like to have a family sooner rather than later. So I think internally I have a bit of anxiety. I want this to happen and I want it to happen now." She added: "So if it takes the 10 years to meet the right person I'll wait the 10 years. It might be a stressful 10 years and I may have a lot of ups and downs in terms of relationships."

Finding a romantic partner for Elyse was a challenge, and often these sites provide more frustration than advantage to seek a romantic partner. She explained: "I think I'm going to go and do more events, like socializing events, not so much dating events. I take it as if you want to win the lottery you have to buy a ticket, if you don't buy a ticket, you won't win." Eventually, for this reason, she has decided to make her online account inactive, and to find her romantic partner through traditional ways.

As I have previously mentioned, the interviews were ended by a few recommendations and request additional research in regards to ODSs from Jennifer and Elyse. These statements suggest a number of new avenues for further research; as Jennifer points out: "I would think it would be interesting to look at research of people with different characteristics, such as people who are overweight." Another important point she mentioned was: "I think it is important for people to know about the bad

experiences so that they can reflect on the on the information that they provide to other people.” Furthermore, as this initial research finding is encouraging, further research is necessary in regards to Elyse recommendations: “I would be interested to know the success rates of ODSs. How successful is the average person? From my experiences, I only know two people that met each other through ODSs and got married.”

Qualitative Survey Question Results and Discussion

The data were collected through the last section of the survey where respondents were asked to respond to a few questions along with their comments and feedbacks. There were two fundamental objectives behind this: first, to obtain more awareness, knowledge, and experiences in regards ODSs from more samples; and second, to compare and contrast data both from the interviews and qualitative survey. As I have previously mentioned, out of 20 respondents, a total of 13 responded to the last section of the survey. Throughout this analysis, each of respondent will be identified by number (e.g., respondent 1, 2, etc.).

Although a few of respondents (n=5, or 38%) had positive experiences with ODSs (e.g., one of them had a relationship), other respondents reported that he/she lived with a partner for a year, other respondents had sexual relationships for a while with a partner that he/she met through ODSs, and one respondent got married to a romantic partner he/she met through ODSs. However, more than half of the respondents had some concerns about risks and consequences of the use of ODSs; for instance, about daters who have mental illness issues. The following codes were reported by respondents when they described fears about online daters: “catfish”, “identity theft”, “fraudulent”, “dangerous”, and “bad people”.

Untrustworthy/Safety Concerns

Based on the literature review presented in chapter 2, I have found that one of the characteristics of the dating process is that ODSs provide trusting and safe places for people to meet romantic partners. However, when respondents were questioned about untrustworthy online daters, the majority of them (n=13, or 100%) cited the negative impacts of using ODSs. Respondent 2 expressed concern that online daters would lie and he/she wasn't confident in the truthfulness of the online daters' profiles: "people can lie and fib about anything and everything. It can be a fake profile".

Respondent 4 had more negative perceptions than positive ones about ODSs; he/she stated that these sites are a risky place to seek a romantic partner: "Person could be dangerous, or could be fraudulent." Respondent 6 felt that although there might be risks to meet a romantic partner through traditional ways, he/she has decided to not use ODSs to find a romantic partner: "I am very aware and after only a few dates, I decided this was not the arena for me to meet a romantic partner." Respondent 8 indicated that "I do not trust anyone online. Although I have explored it, I have not actually gone forth with any dates."

Respondent 11 pointed out another argument about untruthfulness of online daters: "People can present themselves in a way that is not congruent with whom they actually are. They can take advantage of you or deceive you emotionally and financially." Some of respondents also consider that ODSs can present not only risks and consequences but also emotional challenges. Respondent 12 states that: "I have heard stories, both from friends and on the news about terrible ODS experiences."

Given the statements provided by respondents, further research should be done to investigate the risks and consequences pertaining to the use of ODSs, particularly in regards to online daters' self-presentation and self-disclosure. In order to better understand how self-presentation on ODSs differs from traditional ways of meeting a romantic partner, respondents were asked to provide their perceptions. Respondent 2 suggests that through the traditional world people can find a better match. He /she defined his/her opinion: "Face to face is better because you probably meet in a place that you both are attracted to and therefore have some same interests."

Respondent 3 claims that one of the issues with online profiles is that the majority of daters misrepresent themselves. He/she explained: "I was told by a few men I met on a site who become friends telling me that men only look at the females' photos, and don't even bother reading their introductions." Respondent 4 said it can be dangerous when online daters have power over other online daters; he/she said: "Initially they are meeting an avatar of you."

As stated by respondent 8, ODSs offer random selections of potential romantic partners and online daters often unaware of the true identity of other daters. He/she explained: "You can create an alternate persona /image /relationship that do not reflect reality." In contrast, respondent 10 states that ODSs give daters not only access to a lot of daters online, but also these sites provide the possibility for daters to represent themselves in different ways. He/she mentioned that: "There is more flexibility online to present yourself in a way that differs from your actual appearance, personality, etc." Respondent 11 adds that there is "More time to consider your responses."

Deception/Privacy Concerns

According to prior studies (e.g., Toma et al., 2008), the majority of online daters use deception in their self-presentation, particularly about their physical attributes, age, weight, and height. Koeppel et al. (2013) found that ODSs are viewed as risky and dangerous ways to find a romantic partner due to dishonesty amongst online daters.

Given that, I was interested in gaining an understanding about how self-disclosure is related in ODSs environments. Respondents were asked, “Are you aware of the impact of disclosing personal information on ODSs?” A few respondents reported that they never reveal their personal information through ODSs. Some of the respondents mentioned that they weren’t self-assured about online daters’ truthfulness. Respondent 3 raised concerns about online profile, photos, and personal information, such as age, marital status, and relationship status: “All information that is shared on these sites can be accessed by anyone who signs on. Even though one may delete their profiles, the sites potentially own our contents and photos.”

Respondent 5 complained about the emotional and physical risks of using ODSs, and the risk of encountering dangerous and dishonest online daters. He /she explained: “They can track you outside of the website and cause awkward/ dangerous situations.” In certain situations privacy concerns may provide better motivation for online daters to protect themselves from potential risks, while they have become involved in ODSs (Gibbs et al., 2011). Respondent 10 said: “People can track you, you may be stalked, you could become a target of identity theft, you could lose your job or damage your reputation, etc.”

Respondents were asked: “Does self-presentation in an ODS differ from traditional ways of meeting a romantic partner?” The majority of them were concerned about lies and dishonesty of online daters in ODS environments. Respondent 3 suggested that “It’s a very superficial way to assess if that candidate is good or bad based on the photos they upload.” Respondent 1 hoped for more honesty in ODS environments as it appears that it is not always possible to trust a romantic partner online. He/she believes that an ODS is perceived to be a risky place for meeting romantic partner: “There will always be people who abuse anonymity and say negative things to hurt others.”

Lack of Trust

In traditional dating interactions, I believe physical appearance has a significant influence on perception of intentions and willingness to trust others, but in an ODS environments, how online daters can trust others due to the lack of information about physical appearance during initial communications. To discover the relationship between trust and emotional vulnerability, respondents were asked whether they would say most online daters are trustworthy. Data obtained from one of the respondents gives the impression that very few online daters can trust others. He/she described in detail his/her thoughts: “From my experiences, most people do lie about their interests to appear more appealing. Most upload a very 'attractive' photo of themselves, sometimes from a decade ago. But I have never encountered someone who has been totally dishonest about themselves.”

Along with this statement, this respondent seemed able to describe the depth of his/her feelings toward others because he/she has not met dishonest potential partners. Stanier et al. (2010) state:

Most dating websites implement a matchmaking process that attempts to recommend potential suitable users based on a user's preferences, characteristics and location. However, regardless of whether two people are highly matched according to a particular algorithm, these two people are still strangers. This can make initial online conversation difficult as the two parties know little of each other apart from what is presented in their profiles. Additionally, it makes the initial real life meeting uncomfortable as both parties may not live up to each other's expectations or have the same personality as they assume online. (p. 50)

While in most studies there has been little research conducted on the subject of trust in ODSs, available data suggest that in some cases online daters feel their trust has been betrayed due to others' dishonesty. I argue that trust is the first and perhaps most important aspect of a relationship between people. In ODS environments the most important limitation for trust lies in the fact that physical appearance and non-verbal communication are absent.

Chapter Summary

The purpose of the survey and interviews was to identify, explore, and describe participants' motivation of using ODSs, and how they present themselves through these sites. The data analysis from quantitative, qualitative and the qualitative survey questions support my research questions regarding how and why postsecondary students use ODSs. Throughout the findings from both interviews and qualitative survey question several themes emerged such as self-presentation, which is considered to be an important aspect of online profile. Furthermore, it has been found that ODS users often misrepresent and exaggerate themselves in order to attract more romantic partners. Other themes

corresponded to deceptive self-presentation, particularly in regards to relationship status, background, height, and age. Physical appearance also is a significant issue amongst online daters, whereby the majority of them exaggerate their self-presentation by posting inaccurate photos in their online profile.

Overall, finding a romantic partner for the purpose of a short-term or a long-term relationship and eventually for the purpose of forming a family was deemed to be participants' most important motivation to use ODSs.

CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, AND IMPLICATIONS

Some topics may not relate to education programs (e.g., sex education); however, the results of the current study show that the debate concerning the usage of ODSs and its risks and consequences should be taught in these types of programs. Even more, ODSs are the foremost means for finding a potential partner and their popularity and influence amongst people is constantly growing. The findings throughout the literature review demonstrated that millions of individuals all over the world use at least one ODS, and the primary motivation for using these sites is to seek a romantic relationship and/or a marriage partner. Also, due to certain features of ODSs, such as anonymity, many individuals seek casual encounters or sexual partners on such sites.

Summary of the Study

Although ODSs are a worldwide phenomenon and there have been studies about ODSs, the research has mainly addressed society in general, and there are only a few studies that focus on specific groups of ODS users, such as postsecondary students.

The purpose of this thesis, therefore, was to address gaps in the related literature and investigate whether ODSs are a method used by postsecondary students to seek a possible romantic partner. Its aim was also to present how ODS processes typically require daters to provide personal information, and how these sites allow daters to seek for a potential partner on the basis of usual information (e.g., gender, age, marital status or location). Given this, the current study also investigated three important aspects of creating online profiles in ODS environments: self-presentation, self-disclosure, and deception. Consequently, the specific research questions were as follows: (a) Why do

postsecondary students become involved in ODSs? And, (b) How do they present themselves in ODSs?

As mentioned above, the purpose of this study was to investigate an area that has little known or available data within academic research. The design was a mixed methods approach with triangulation. The quantitative or descriptive data and characteristics about the samples being studied, and qualitative or explanatory used for explanation of the nature of certain relationship, were incorporated in the design of the current research study.

The target population and site of the current study was from a public university in Southern Ontario. The participants were contacted via e-mail to obtain introductory permission for participation in the study, survey and interviews, during the months of November, 2013. Furthermore, the aim of the study was to use a sample of postsecondary students to refine and expand an initial explanation of the investigation, not only looking into the attitudes and behaviour of participants toward ODSs usage, but also to provide a comprehensive overview of their opinions, experiences, and perceptions in regards to their motivations for using ODSs, what factors affected their self-presentation while creating their profile, and how self-presentation plays an important role in ODS environments. Combinations of quantitative and qualitative methodology were, therefore, used in the data collection and analysis.

Phase 1 of the study was conducted in the form of survey with data being gathered through questionnaires. A screening questionnaire was distributed through FluidSurveys. The questionnaire was used to gather data from participants regarding their attitudes, behaviour, and knowledge about ODSs, as well as to recruit participants for in-

depth face-to-face interviews. Twenty participants responded to the survey and the majority of participants were females. Data collected from the questionnaire were tabulated and analyzed using descriptive statistics, cross-tabulation, and chi-square testing generated by the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20.

Phase 2 involved in-depth individual interviews conducted with two female postsecondary students. The interviews employed a semi-structured format and the interview protocol included open-ended questions, which gave participants greater freedom to express their opinions, views, and experiences about ODSs and their mechanisms such as self-presentation, self-disclosure, and deception. Each of the interviews took approximately one hour and they were digitally recorded and then transcribed. Data collected from interviews were analyzed using NVivo. Procedures of coding and the results of the major themes were discussed in detail in Chapter 4.

Overall, data obtained from both questionnaires and interviews provided significant information related to postsecondary students' motivations, (e.g., finding a friendship and a long-term relationship), and how they present themselves in ODSs (e.g., self-presentation in their online profile), and also demonstrated in detail a few negative aspects of ODSs such as lack of trust and the risks and consequences of using ODSs.

Discussion

The underlying purpose of this study was to contribute to the existing body of literature available on the subject of using ODSs and provide insight into a gap in the literature regarding the usage of ODSs amongst postsecondary students. Data collected from this investigation, however, must be interpreted with caution and cannot be generalized due to the study's small sample size. A total of 20 participants, including

survey and interviews, are not enough to make generalizations about the usage of ODSs amongst postsecondary students. More specifically, not all postsecondary students have become involved in ODSs. However, results from the current study suggest that there is a statistically significant relationship between postsecondary students and ODSs.

Taken as a whole, the results of this research study provided support for the “why” and “how” aspects of this study’s research questions. In response to the question why, the findings suggest daters use ODSs to seek a romantic partner for the purpose of forming a long-term relationship and/or finding a marriage partner as the most significant motivating factor amongst postsecondary students. In regards to cyber management of ODS accounts, for a few postsecondary students, physical appearance (i.e., having an attractive photos in a profile) was considered an important aspect of self-presentation in ODS contexts since it appears that many online daters often have contact with daters who have included attractive photos in their profile. For others, although an attractive photo in a profile is important, they did not add photos to their profile due to concerns about their physical appearance and not wanting to appear “overweight.” The major findings are discussed below.

Loneliness, getting older, and moving to new areas had a significant impact on some postsecondary students’ motivation to use ODSs. However, Finkel et al. (2012) suggest that expressing emotions such as depression, sickness, and loneliness through personal profiles might have a negative impact on daters and might create unhappy offline relationships.

Finding a friendship, a romantic partner for the purpose of forming a long-term relationship, and/or finding a marriage partner were other motivations for participants

who became involved with ODSs. Once again, although caution must be applied due to the small sample size, the data obtained from participants demonstrated that those who became involved in ODSs did so to find a romantic partner.

On the other hand, as it is presented in Chapter 2, a few researchers indicate that not all of daters seek a romantic partner for a long-term relationship. Given this, Sofia's ex-boyfriend's motivation to use ODSs was to seek a casual encounter or to find a sexual partner. Accordingly, it should be emphasized that predatory sexual behaviours such as those exhibited by Sofia's ex-boyfriend must be taken into consideration and postsecondary students must be more vigilant while involved in ODSs. Peters (2009) maintains that the world of online romance is troubled with threats from liars and sexual predators, and the majority of daters are unable to notice signs of dishonesty by other daters online. This would suggest that not only postsecondary students, but also any individuals have to pay close attention to detail in the contents of profiles during the screening process in order to avoid any possible danger and/or risks and consequences.

Couch et al. (2012) recommend that we emphasize that using ODSs for the purpose of casual encounters may involve certain risks, including unwanted pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections, and sexual violence, as well as emotional and physical issues that may continue when online relationships result in offline meetings. I argue that students have to be very careful while they are looking for a romantic partner through ODSs, since not all online daters can be trusted.

A few participants argued that meeting a romantic partner through traditional methods might be riskier than through ODSs; however, research has shown quite conclusively that ODS areas are less safe because the anonymity of ODS users means

these strangers might be dangerous or fraudulent. More explicitly, ODSs allow misrepresentation and most online daters exaggerate themselves during self-presentation. Some of them might also take advantage of the anonymity and deceive others emotionally and psychologically.

The finding from the review of the literature indicates that there is no guarantee that an ODS user may encounter a romantic partner who is totally honest and sincere about her/his background and objectives. I would argue that postsecondary students must become more aware of the risks and consequences of posting their personal information online. Also, all such information can be reviewed by others, and even if users decide to remove their profile, their personal information and photos remain on that site, even though these accounts are not accessible by others, as reported by a few respondents.

Concerning self-presentation in ODS environments, McWilliams & Barrett, (2014) argue that physical attractiveness plays an important part and was viewed as simplifying the initiation of online romantic relationships. In fact, it was found that there are different effects of being “attractive” and “unattractive” in ODS environments. Besides, ODSs encourage online daters to be “charming daters” by adding attractive photographs in their profiles (Toma & Hancock, 2012); as a result, physical attractiveness is the most important quality for online daters. In contrast, the result of my findings demonstrated that although a few participants do not wish to convey that they are “overweight”, they did not include attractive photos in their profile in order to be contacted by others, as a few participants reported. Given this, it is important to point out how postsecondary students may be affected as a result of being rejected from others due to their physical appearances.

Turning now to the experimental evidence on anonymity in ODS environments, most researchers would argue that anonymity in ODSs is considered a significant opportunity for online daters to use deceptive self-presentation. For instance, Sofia's ex-boyfriend was not a tall man, appeared older than his age, and was in a common law relationship, but he manipulated his height, age, and marital status in his online profile. This can confirm that unattractive daters misrepresent themselves more than others in order to increase their chance of finding a romantic partner. Given this, evidence showed that male daters are more likely to misrepresent their marital status, relationship goals, physical appearance, height, and age (Gibbs et al., 2012; Mesch, 2012; Schmitz et al., 2013; Toma et al., 2012). Also, Kang et al. (2013) point out that the majority of online daters are unaware of who might have access to their personal information due to the anonymity of daters.

To a certain extent daters, including college students, with low self-esteem are more likely to use ODSs than those with higher self-esteem, since those daters with low self-esteem are more comfortable to present themselves to anonymous daters (Sheeks and Birchmeier, 2007). On the other hand, online daters with unattractive physical appearances are more likely to experience a lower level of stress about disclosing themselves through these sites, due to anonymity on ODSs, as reported by a few participants. Conversely, however, as stated by other participants of this study, anonymity is not always an advantage in the context of ODSs because some online daters could be predators, hackers, or sex offenders who are looking for information or other online daters with sexual addictions seeking sexual activity.

This diverging point of view is very interesting because, in spite of some advantage for those daters who use anonymity an ODS for various purposes, there is increasing concern about the disadvantages of the use of anonymity in ODS environments because a lot of daters represent a perfect self-image and exaggerate their personality, while in reality they are not quite who they represent.

Overall, the current research study confirms prior findings and contributes additional evidence regarding ODS usage and its impact on postsecondary students. For instance, in terms of emotional concern, a few participants reported that waiting for a response from daters to whom they have replied is stressful. Accordingly, a few of them have spent considerable time and money on ODSs in the hope of finding a partner. On the other hand, some online daters can become easily addicted to this type of online activity, which might provoke a negative effect on their professional, social, and personal relationships. This is certainly true in the case of Sofia's ex-boyfriend who had an addiction to ODSs and chatting with strangers through these sites. This study therefore questions whether the curriculum in Ontario educational institutions is effective in increasing students' knowledge about ODSs.

Limitations

A number of significant limitations of the current research need to be considered. The most important limitation of my research was the relatively small number of participants in the survey. Other major reason was the time of year and the private/personal nature of topic. A larger sample would have allowed more data to increase the validity of the findings.

Second, the majority of respondents were females. One possible explanation for this might be that females are more likely than males to use ODSs for finding a romantic partner. Or male participants are more uncomfortable participating in such research study than female participants. Thus, unequal gender had an impact on the results of the current research; more specifically, it was difficult to compare and contrast between two genders in regards to their motivations, views, and opinions about ODSs. My research needs to be replicated with larger samples of both genders.

Third, my sample comprised only postsecondary students in an education program. These results therefore need to be interpreted with caution, principally with respect to the generalization of research findings of postsecondary online daters as a whole. Therefore, further research should be done to investigate postsecondary students in all programs, focusing on a larger, and more diversified sample.

Despite these limitations, the current research has given an account of ODSs, which can be used for academic research in regards to not only students' motivations, but also the hidden truths of self-presentation, self-disclosure, and deception in ODS environments. Further studies could explore the same research with more participants either for in-depth interviews or surveys.

Implications for Future Research and Educational Practice

One of major implication of my research for education is more sex education program in high school and postsecondary students on the subject of ODSs, in particular self-presentation, self-disclosure and deceptive self-presentation in ODSs. Besides the benefits and efforts of ODSs related to finding a perfect match for daters, if the debate is to be moved forward, a better understanding of the disadvantages of ODSs needs to be

discussed as well. Therefore, the findings from this thesis provide the following insights for future research.

First, some participants believed that ODSs are a great way to find a partner through a large pool of online daters, which is different than traditional methods. It would be interesting to compare the experiences of those who had positive experiences and those who had negative experiences in their search for a potential partner through ODSs, and how these experiences have impacted their personal and/or professional lives.

Furthermore, the results of this investigation showed that one of the risks and consequences of using ODSs is that some daters' requests for casual encounters are emotionally upsetting for some participants. More research is needed to investigate how sensitivity and negative emotions might impact postsecondary students, and how it may differ by genders. Further, anonymity has been found to be a major influence in deceptive self-presentation in ODSs environment, so more work will need to be done to determine a fundamental reason for using anonymity in these areas.

Another possible area of future research would be to investigate physical appearance in ODSs environment, which is considered as the most important aspect of online profiles. Hence, it would be interesting to compare experiences of postsecondary students who consider themselves attractive with those who feel unattractive on ODSs. In the same vein, further work needs to be done to establish whether or not postsecondary students' physical appearance had an impact on their unsuccessful attempts to find a romantic partner through ODSs.

Moreover, as explained earlier, some participants were victimized as a result of their physical appearance, therefore, knowing more stories about this challenge might

hold a significant message, not only for postsecondary students, but also for all vulnerable and naïve individuals who use ODSs for the purpose of finding a romantic partner.

It is a well-known fact that using ODSs is more harmful than beneficial to one's emotional well-being; nevertheless, a lot of daters turn to ODSs in search of a romantic partner. I therefore suggest that further research in this field would be of great help in better understanding how daters can trust strangers through ODSs.

Concerning educational practice, on the other hand, the findings of the current study have a number of significant implications for future practice, such as: Findings of this research study might assist academic institutions in their understanding of ODSs based on postsecondary students' experiences. Furthermore, some of the participants were honest about their self-presentation- they mentioned in their profile that they were "overweight"-, however, they felt that they had become victims of their honesty. Hence, they were rejected by other daters, and they were not contacted. The role of educators would be of great help if they can provide support for students—particularly in addressing various issues related to violence against them. Educators can also offer pertinent information about ODSs through workshops and discussions and/or referrals to other services offered at their institutions such as counselling.

Conclusion

With the accessibility of the Internet anywhere and at any time, and considering the massive changes in contemporary lifestyles, such as long working hours, moving to a new area, and lack of time to participate in family or social events to attract a partner, many individuals have turned to ODSs to find a romantic partner.

Although these sites are becoming a major business, and not all of these sites are free of charge, it is unclear why millions of optimistic individuals use ODSs despite the considerable amounts of both time and money spent finding a romantic relationship. As Finkel et al. (2012) mentioned: “Indeed, online dating has enormous potential to ameliorate what is for many people a time-consuming and often frustrating activity: the pursuit of a committed, emotionally satisfying romantic relationship” (p. 53).

While some critics may be skeptical about the potentially harmful consequences of using ODSs, I remind readers that Sofia—who ultimately was the inspiration for this thesis—was an indirect victim of this new technology, and a few participants may also be considered as direct victims, albeit to a less harmful degree.

Taken together, one question remains to be asked: How many people, including students, all around the world have and have yet to become- indirect and/or direct-victims of ODSs? My position is that: Strong need for policy documents on self-presentation, self-disclosure, and deception online. More critical awareness and transparent discourse about how individuals/students present themselves – perhaps part of coursework. Preparing students for this worldwide phenomenon and informing them about safety and healthy relationships.

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APPENDIX A

Survey Questionnaire

Dear Respondents,

You are invited to participate in an online survey designed to better understand postsecondary students' experiences, motivations, self-presentation, misrepresentation, and deception in Online Dating Sites (ODSs) environments. This survey will take approximately 15-20 minutes.

Submission of the online survey is your consent to participate. Once the survey responses have been submitted, there is no way to withdraw the survey, as the survey is set up to be anonymous, hence one's survey cannot be retrieved and/or removed.

Section 1- General Information

Please indicate your gender:	Male	Female
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Select the range that includes your age	17-19	20-25	26-30	31-40	41- >
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please indicate your marital status:	Single	Engaged	Married	Divorced	Separated	Widowed
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

You are considered as:	A full-time student	A part-time student
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Select the term that best describes your current status as a student	A domestic student	An international student
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Have you ever explored online dating sites?	Yes	No
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Did you ever have an online dating account?	Yes	No
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Do you currently have an online dating account?	Yes	No
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

From which source did you find out about online dating sites? Select all that apply	Myself	<input type="checkbox"/>	Internet	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Friends	<input type="checkbox"/>	Newspapers	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Family	<input type="checkbox"/>	Other _____	

Which of the following accounts do you have or have you used in the past? Select all that apply	ChristianMingle	<input type="checkbox"/>	PlentyofFish	<input type="checkbox"/>
	EHarmony	<input type="checkbox"/>	Singlesnet	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Lavalife	<input type="checkbox"/>	True	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Match.com	<input type="checkbox"/>	Zoosk	<input type="checkbox"/>
	OkCupid	<input type="checkbox"/>	Other _____	

Where do you access online dating sites? Select all that apply	Home	<input type="checkbox"/>	Cell-phone	<input type="checkbox"/>
	University	<input type="checkbox"/>	Work	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Library	<input type="checkbox"/>	Coffee shop	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Friend (s) house	<input type="checkbox"/>	Other _____	

Section 2- Frequency-usage How long have you used each of the following sites	Less than 6 months	6 months to less than 1 year	1 year to less than 3 years	3 years to less than 5 years	5 years or more
ChristianMingle	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
EHarmony	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Lavalife	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Match.com	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
OkCupid	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
PlentyofFish	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Singlesnet	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
True	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Zoosk	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Section 3- Frequency-Visits What is the frequency of your visits to the following sites:	Less than 6 months	6 months to less than 1 year	1 year to less than 3 years	3 years to less than 5 years	5 years or more
ChristianMingle	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
EHarmony	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Lavalife	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Match.com	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
OkCupid	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
PlentyofFish	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Singlesnet	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
True	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Zoosk	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Indicate your level of agreement with each statement

Section 4 --Motivation to use/visit ODSs	Not at all important	Low important	Neutral	Moderately important	Very important
1. Seeking a romantic partner for the purpose of a long-term relationship.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Seeking a casual partner	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Finding a marriage partner.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Curiosity, just want to explore dating sites	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. Not having to leave 'home' to search for romance	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. Increased accessibility to meet and mingle compared to traditional dating	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Section 5– How I present myself online within dating sites	Untrue	Untrue of what I believe	Neutral	Somewhat true of what I believe	True of what I believe
1. I have developed a strategy for my self-presentation in online dating.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. I think I am too concerned about my self-presentation online.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. My online self-presentation has an effect on my offline relationships.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. My online personal profile allows me to present myself in a favourable way.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. ODS has become an innovative arena for self-presentation.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. The perspective of others has an impact on my self-presentation.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Section 6- Use of profile photos in ODSs.	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree or disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
1. My online profile must include a photograph because that is the best way to meet potential partners.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. I have a recent photo in my online profile.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. I have used photo-shop image for my profile.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. I use an image from the past.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. I have used photos of more attractive individuals for my profile	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. I do not believe it is necessary to include a photo.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Section 7 Self-Disclosure in ODSs	Completely true	Mostly true	Somewhat true/false	Mostly false	Completely false
1. I am sincere when I share my feeling with those I meet online.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. I am always conscious of what I am saying about myself in an online environment.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. I am always honest in my self-disclosure while in online.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. I am comfortable to disclose my emotions and I am interested in other's emotions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. I am open to reveal my personal information with others.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. Knowing what other daters think of me is important to me.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Section 8- Level of Agreement-Deception in online environments.	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree or disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
1. Female daters lie about their age.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Female daters lie about their marital status.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Female daters lie about who they really are.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Male daters lie about their age.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. Male daters lie about their marital status.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. I am willing to state little lies because I want others to contact me.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. I share big lies because I want others to contact me	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Indicate your level of agreement with each statement.

Section 9- Online Dating Experiences	Very Dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Unsure	Satisfied	Very Satisfied
1. I no longer use this/these site (s) because I have found a partner.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. I continue to use the sites even though I have found a partner.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. I am unable to find a romantic partner online; this situation has a negative impact on my emotions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. My online relationships frequently end after the first date.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. ODSs gave me the opportunity to encounter my actual partner.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. The dater I met offline wasn't the dater I was corresponding with.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Section 10- ODSs-Awareness	Yes	No
1. Are you aware of the impact of disclosing personal information on ODSs?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Are you aware of the risks of untrustworthy people online?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Do you have any concerns if someone at your university sees your profile online?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Does self-presentation in an ODS differ from traditional ways of meeting partners?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. Have you been in a relationship with someone that you met through an ODS site?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. Would you consider dating someone who had not attached a photo to his/her profile?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. Would you like to know what other online daters think about you?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. Would you say that most daters can be trusted in ODSs?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. Would you say that you always disclose only positive things about yourself in an online environment?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

APPENDIX B

Interview Protocol

1. Are you currently a member of an ODS?
2. How long have you been a member of this site?
3. Please tell me about the reason(s) for the first time you have decided to use an ODS?
4. What are the characteristics of a romantic partner that you are looking for?
5. Can you tell me how effective you found your membership on paid and unpaid ODS?
6. Regarding self-presentation, what type of strategies have you employed when creating your online profile?
7. Please tell me about good or bad experiences you had while you used an ODS?
8. Would you say that online daters can be always trusted?
9. Do you have any questions, recommendations, or suggestions?